

Israel closes off W. Bank, Gaza

TELAVIV (AFP) — Israel on Saturday completely closed off the West Bank and Gaza Strip until Wednesday to prevent Palestinian attacks during the Jewish festival of Purim, an Israeli military spokesman said. Defence Minister Moshe Arens imposed the measure following "warnings of intended terrorist attacks" during the holiday, the spokesman said. It is the first complete Israeli shut-down of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since mid-October. The closure means some 60,000 Palestinians employed in Israel will be unable to get to their jobs as well as another 40,000 or so who work there illegally.

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Netanyahu says Israel wants out of south Lebanon

AMMAN (AFP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Saturday that Israel aims to withdraw from south Lebanon and has no intention of annexing any Lebanese land. "We would have left Lebanon yesterday if we could," Netanyahu told AFP in Amman by telephone, adding that it was Israel's "ultimate goal" to withdraw from its self-declared security zone in south Lebanon. He said the Jewish state had "no desire" to annex "even an inch" of Lebanese land and that the current occupation was just a "temporary measure" intended to protect Israel from attacks by the Hizbollah movement.

Communist Party names candidates for Israel elections

ILABUN (AFP) — Israel's Communist Hadash Party on Saturday named its first three candidates for the legislative elections due to take place in May. The Communist-backed Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash) tapped Hadash Secretary General Mohammad Baraka, an Arab Muslim, to head its list for the May 17 polling. The group also named Communist Party official Issam Maltu, an Arab Christian, for the second spot and picked veteran MP Tamar Gozansky for the third place on its candidate list.

Serb policeman killed in ambush

PRISTINA (AFP) — A Serb policeman was killed and another seriously injured in an ambush Saturday by Kosovo guerrilla fighters on a patrol in the town of Kivovo, the Serb Information Centre here said. Fighters of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) opened automatic gunfire on the police vehicle, which responded, officials from the centre said. The fighters fled the scene and the wounded policeman was taken to a hospital in Pristina, Kosovo's regional capital, they said. It was the first report of a killing of a Serb policeman since the Rambouillet peace conference brought the sides together earlier this month to try to agree on a settlement.

Nearly 50 arrests at German demos

MAGDEBURG (AP) — About 1,000 radical rightists demonstrated against foreigners in Magdeburg Saturday, with police arresting 25 leftist counter-demonstrators for throwing stones and bottles at officers guarding the demonstration. Also, in the eastern town of Wurzen, about 15 km east of Leipzig, police said 22 rightists were arrested after they leaned out of windows and threw manure and bags of paint into a crowd of 250 leftists marching in a protest against neo-Nazis. The Magdeburg demonstration, organised by the rightist National Party of Germany, was held under the motto "No German passports for foreigners," to protest Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's plans to liberalise Germany's citizenship law to allow dual citizenship.

Eight killed in Dhaka slum fire

DHAKA (AFP) — At least eight people were killed, seven of them children, Saturday in a fire at a slum in the Bangladesh capital of Dhaka, a news agency reported. The private UNB agency said the toll was eight but may rise as rescue workers cleared debris. Police confirmed five deaths. Fire officials said the injured were being treated in hospital. About 5,000 shanties housing more than 20,000 people were totally destroyed in the fire, they said.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية مستقلة عن المؤسسة الصحفية الاردنية - الراي

Tarawneh holds talks with Palestinian officials Decision on postponing statehood declaration premature — official

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — A top Palestinian official said after talks with Jordanian leaders on Saturday that the Palestinian leadership was looking "for a suitable way" to resolve a controversy sparked by plans to unilaterally declare a Palestinian state on May 4.

But Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestine Liberation Organisation's (PLO) second in command, said it was too early to consider postponing plans to declare statehood at the end of the five-year Palestinian autonomy set out by the Oslo accords. Israel has said it would annex parts of the West Bank in response to such a move.

"We have not discussed the issue of a postponement [of the declaration]," he told reporters after talks with Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh and Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khatib.

"However, we are looking for a suitable way to [resolve] this issue... but for now, we are not considering whether to make a postponement or not."

Recent media reports have suggested that Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has been advised by several countries, including European Union members and the United States, to postpone the declaration of statehood until after the Israeli parliamentary elections in May.

However, he was looking for guarantees from Washington, the 15-member EU and other states that they would recognise a future Palestinian state if he agreed to postpone the controversial declaration.

Abbas said he briefed Tarawneh and Khatib on



Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh on Saturday holds talks with Mahmoud Abbas, the PLO's second in command, and chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat (Petra photo)

"the latest consultations" between the Palestinian National Authority and the U.S. and European parties over the issue.

Saturday's meeting was the first official encounter between Jordanian and PNA officials since Arafat revived an old idea of a confederation between Jordan and a future Palestinian state two weeks ago.

The idea, which PLO officials insisted was taken out of context during a routine speech to activists of Arafat's Fateh movement in the West Bank town of Hebron, met with a cool reception from Jordan and Israel.

Jordan reiterated its policy that any decision on a confederation would have to wait until the status of the Palestinian areas has been determined in negotiations with Israel.

Jordanian deputies, par-

ties across the political spectrum and newspapers joined forces in criticising Arafat's trial balloon on the grounds that such plans were premature.

"We should not misunderstand such statements which come from here or there... every now and then we talk about our hopes and ambitions," Abbas said.

"We cannot establish such a confederation now [with Jordan] because Palestine is not an independent state," he added.

The Israelis also said talk about a confederation did nothing to allay fears about Palestinian plans to declare a state.

The idea of a confederation was first proposed, though not fully defined, in a 1985 pact between Arafat and the late King Hussein on joint peace talks with Israel. In 1987 the Palestin-

ian National Council passed a resolution approving confederation with Jordan after statehood was achieved.

Khatib reiterated Jordan's continued support for a comprehensive peace on the "Palestinian-Israeli track in order to achieve overall peace that all peoples in this region want."

Khatib also said that the government has demanded a clarification from Israel on statements attributed to Netanyahu in which the Israeli premier expressed his fear of a future alliance between Amman and Baghdad.

"We have asked for clarification and the official text of Prime Minister Netanyahu's remarks and we are waiting to receive such clarifications in order to respond to these comments," Khatib told reporters.

King thanks Kuwaiti emir for prisoners' pardon FM to reopen embassy this week

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — His Majesty King Abdullah on Saturday sent a cable to Kuwaiti Emir Jaber Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah thanking him for his decision to pardon the last eight Jordanian prisoners in Kuwait.

"I would like to express my deep appreciation for your kind and noble decision to pardon a number of Jordanian prisoners in Kuwait," King Abdullah said. "We consider Your Royal Highness' kind move as a great step to strengthen the two countries' relations."

On Friday, the Foreign Ministry released the names of the eight Jordanian prisoners Kuwait pardoned last week. They are: Abdul Rahman Sa'd Al Hussein, Imad Mahmoud Nimer, Mamoun Mohamad Masoud, Imad Sami Thari, Ahmad Eid Mustafa, Osama Suheil Abdullah Al Hassan, Mahmoud Omar Saleh and Hamdeh Asa'd Yunes.

On Thursday, Kuwait's emir granted pardons to 306 prisoners, including the last eight Jordanians held for collaboration with Iraqi forces following the

August 1990 invasion of the Gulf emirate. Their release follows that of 13 other Jordanians in April 1998.

Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khatib is due to visit Kuwait Tuesday on a ground-breaking trip to improve ties and to reopen the Jordanian embassy for the first time since the Gulf crisis, an official source said.

"Khatib on Tuesday will be carrying a letter from His Majesty King Abdullah to his brother, Kuwait's emir... focusing on bilateral relations and means of strengthening them in all fields," one official told the Jordan Times.

Khatib, who was invited by his Kuwaiti counterpart, is scheduled to meet Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Jaber Al Sabah, Crown Prince Sheikh Sa'd Al Abdullah and the foreign minister to discuss bilateral relations, including the reinstatement of the Jordanian and Kuwaiti ambassadors to their respective posts.

Earlier, Khatib told the Jordan Times that during his visit to Kuwait "we will be discussing all files related to our brotherly relations, and ways

and means of improving them for the benefit of our peoples."

"Khatib is expected to bring the eight released Jordanian prisoners back with him," said the official.

Jordan is also expecting an ease of a Kuwaiti ban on Jordanian labour.

But Suleiman Majed Al Shatin, number two at Kuwait's foreign ministry, was quoted earlier saying "the issue of Jordanian manpower will be controlled by market needs. There will be no preferential treatment, but they [Jordanians] will be treated like other Arabs."

Khatib was due in Kuwait earlier this month to reopen the Jordanian embassy, but the visit was postponed because of the passing away of King Hussein on Feb. 7.

During the Gulf crisis, Kuwait downgraded ties with Jordan after it accused Amman of supporting Iraq.

But relations between Amman and Kuwait started to improve in 1995 when Jordan began to distance itself from Baghdad, calling on Iraq to implement U.N. resolutions.

Jewellery merchant killed in suspected robbery attempt

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — A jewellery shop owner was killed in Jabal Al Hussein last night during a suspected robbery attempt, police said Saturday.

The victim, who was identified as Dourham Aqab Barqawi, 50, owner of Shabrazed jewellery shop, was found inside his business at 7:00 p.m. by one of his neighbours with several bullet wounds to the chest, police said.

Police arrived at the scene

and immediately cordoned off the area, diverting traffic from the busy commercial area of Jabal Al Hussein. No arrests were immediately made, police said, but investigators were lifting fingerprints from inside the shop.

Owners of nearby businesses said they did not hear any gunfire.

A shop owner next door discovered the crime when he saw Barqawi's body lying on the floor.

"When police arrived he was still alive. Later on he

was taken to Palestine Hospital," the owner of a nearby shop told the Jordan Times.

"There was nothing missing from the shop. The only thing that we found was his body lying on the ground," the merchant added.

A security source said that investigations suggested that Barqawi resisted the suspected robber.

"Those who committed the crime fled the scene after they shot at him and did not take anything with them," the security source added.

Officials reject Netanyahu's statements on Iraq ties Relations with other countries a Jordanian concern — Tarawneh

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan yesterday gave Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a mild scolding ahead of his arrival in Amman today over statements he made about the Kingdom's relations with Iraq late last week.

"We reject Netanyahu's statements concerning Jordan's relations with other countries," said Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh in a statement carried by the Jordan News Agency, Petra. "We reiterate Jordan's sincere commitment to the peace treaty with Israel. Discussions of how Jordan's relations with other states, including other Arab states, might or might not be, is solely a Jordanian concern."

"The manner in which we deal [with those] relations is also a Jordanian concern, and we do not accept any external interference in them," the prime minister said.

He did not say whether or not the issue would be on the agenda during his meeting today with Netanyahu.

Tarawneh was referring to statements made by Netanyahu last Thursday to students at Israel's right-wing Bar Ilan University in Tel Aviv, expressing his fear that Jordan could enter into an alliance with Iraq against Israel and indicating that the late King Hussein had sided with Iraq during the 1990-91 Gulf War when Iraq rained nearly three dozen Scud missiles on Israel.

Netanyahu said that it had been none other than the "knight of peace — King Hussein" who had allied himself with Baghdad.

His words caused a furore in Amman, which had called for a diplomatic solution to the Gulf crisis in order to avoid an all-out war. Relations between Amman and Baghdad have cooled significantly since then, but King Hussein had continued to caution international leaders on the wisdom of continuing economic sanctions and military action in Iraq, insisting that the territorial integrity of Jordan's eastern neighbour should be maintained.

Politicians also said the statements were an affront to Jordan's peace efforts for which Jordan has suffered much criticism in the Arab World.

Netanyahu's statements were also interpreted as particularly lacking in diplomacy as Jordan is in the midst of a 40-day mourning period for King Hussein and since they were made just ahead of Netanyahu's first official visit to Jordan to meet His Majesty King Abdullah.

Israel yesterday launched a minor diplomatic offensive to clear the air ahead of talks here, which will also be attended by Tarawneh, Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khatib and his Israeli counterpart Ariel Sharon.

In a statement to the Agency

France Presse Amman bureau, the Israeli premier said that he believed "Jordan is among the countries in whose common interest it is to do whatever it can to prevent the armament of Iraq."

He said that he did not believe Jordan would ever form a military alliance with Iraq and that "Jordan will always want to stay in the camp of peace."

In an interview with Jordan Television, his spokesperson David Bar-Ilan said that statements published in the press, particularly the prominent Israeli Haaretz Hebrew daily, were a "misinterpretation."

"Unfortunately, during elections time, there are some newspapers who are not favourable to Netanyahu and they like to twist his words and put them in the limelight," Bar-Ilan said. "This is what has happened. This was not at all what he meant to say. The friendship, trust and confidence in Jordan and its stability is there and it is safe."

Jordanian official sources have said that talks are likely to focus on the lack of progress in implementing the Wye River agreement, signed in Washington last October between Israel and the Palestinians and brokered by King Hussein. Also on the agenda will be bilateral economic cooperation and barriers to Jordan's trade with the Palestinian territories.

Lebanese civilians reopen road to Israeli-occupied southern village

ARNOUN (AFP) — Civilians used bulldozers to reopen the road to this southern Lebanese village Saturday and defiantly planted a Lebanese flag near the largest Israeli position in the occupied border zone.

They also planted flags from the Hizbollah and Amal militia amid the ruins of a house nearby, drawing heavy fire from the Israeli post that sent them scattering and caused one of the group to faint.

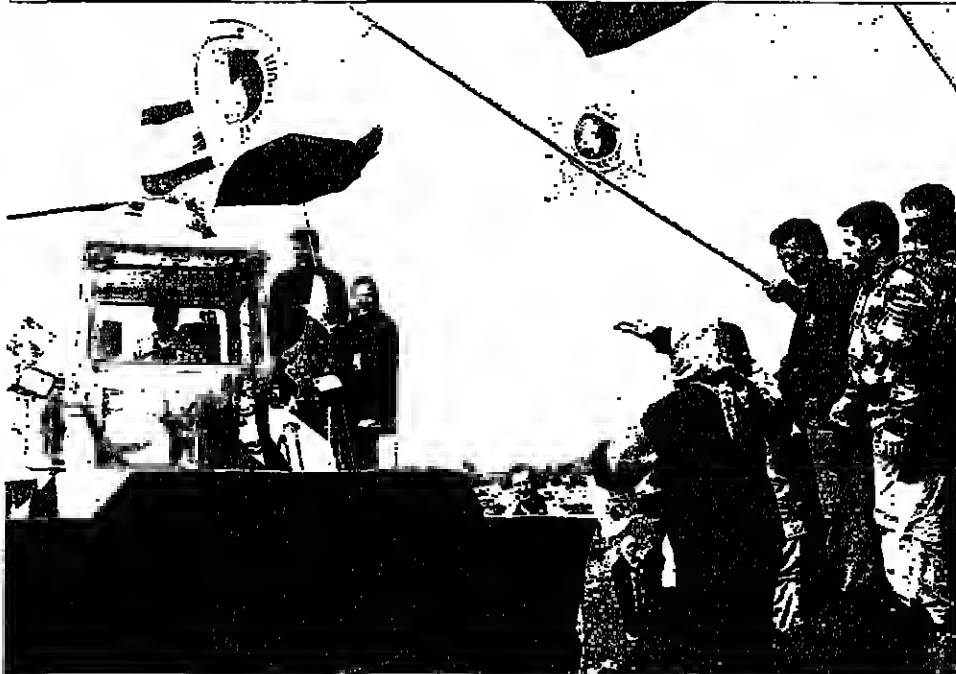
Some 500 Beirut students, accompanied by villagers with shovels and a bulldozer from the nearby village of Natatiyeh, pushed back the sand embankments ringing Arnoun on day two of the first direct civilian action against the Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon.

They bulldozed open the road linking the village to the rest of south Lebanon as highway workers prepared to repave the route, after a crowd on Friday stormed through barbed wire the Israelis had erected around this village on the edge of the Israeli-occupied zone.

Flag-carrying Lebanese demonstrators then followed an ambulance into Arnoun, bringing food and medicine to residents.

Later a group of students planted the Lebanese flag a few hundred metres from Beaufort castle, an 11th-century fortress that is Israel's largest military post in the occupied zone.

But when the youths planted two Hizbollah and two Amal flags in the debris of a wrecked



Lebanese civilians cheer on a bulldozer Saturday as it reopens the road to Arnoun, connecting the south Lebanon village to the rest of Lebanon, one day after they stormed through barbed wire Israelis had erected around the village on the edge of the Israeli-occupied 'security zone' (AFP photo)

house, Israeli troops unleashed heavy fire from the castle and sent the group running. One of them fainted and had to be carried off.

About 2,000 protesters on Friday ripped down the barbed wire, erected Feb. 17 by Israeli soldiers and troops from the Israel-allied South Lebanon Army to block passage from the village except through the occupied zone.

The protesters, who ignored the likely presence of a mine-

field and warning shots fired by the nearby Israeli army, removed the barbed wire and remained in the village until late Friday before ending the protest.

A Lebanese official told AFP afterward that Israel had agreed to remove the barbed wire permanently but had asked Lebanon's chief delegate to the international truce committee monitoring the Lebanese ceasefire to stop the "gatherings and disturbances" in

Arnoun. But Colonel Maher Tufaili refused the request, asserting that "Lebanon rejects any promise or guarantee which could harm the resistance activities," the official said.

The planting of the wire drew sharp criticism from Lebanon, which on Wednesday filed its first complaint to the U.N. Security Council since 1996 and demanded Israeli troops withdraw from the village.

Islamist party launches vote campaign in Turkey

KONYA (R) — Turkey's Islam-based Virtue Party launched its election campaign with a rally in the Islamist stronghold of Konya, vowing to shake off secularist opposition and win power in the April ballot.

About 3,000 party supporters gathered in a sports hall in the Anatolian heartland late on Friday, greeting Virtue leader Necati Kutan with chants of "Here comes the prime minister."

"Virtue is Turkey's hope," said one banner in the hall, decked out with red-and-white party flags and segregated into different sections for men and women.

The party aims to emulate the success of the now-

banned Islamist Welfare Party, which topped the polls in the last election in 1995 with just over 20 per cent of the vote.

Virtue is forecast to do well in the April 18 vote but has attracted strong disapproval from Turkey's powerful generals who see themselves as the guardians of the secular system.

A campaign spearheaded by the military led to the end of a Welfare-led government and the party's closure a year ago for threatening the secular order.

Virtue, which attracted the vast majority of Welfare MPs, is still trying to shed the establishment opposition.

"With God's permission,

nothing can stop us from coming to power," Kutan said in a speech.

In an effort to smooth relations with the military, the party has sent its programme to the army.

"We told them we want a powerful and well-equipped armed force when we come to power. For that reason, your experts should examine our programmes," Kutan said.

The party is keen to allay the fears of many secularists that it wants to introduce Islamic law. A series of mild Islamist reforms introduced by Welfare were key to its downfall.

Some party supporters at the rally expressed doubts about Virtue's prospects

given last week's capture of Turkey's most wanted man, Kurdish guerrilla leader Abdullah Ocalan.

They said his seizure by Turkish special forces could benefit left-wing Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit at Virtue's expense.

"I see a lesser chance for Virtue now after Ecevit managed to get Ocalan to Turkey," a young woman wearing a headscarf who gave her name as Asiye told Reuters. Turkey has hailed the capture of Ocalan as a victory in its battle to crush the rebel Kurdish Labour Party. More than 29,000 people have been killed in its 14-year-old battle for its self-rule in the southeast of the country.



SCREAMING FOR HELP: A Palestinian man screams for help after his friend was wounded by Israeli soldiers on Saturday. About 100 Israeli and Palestinian peace activists toured the sites of expanding settlements in the Bethlehem region on Saturday trying to plant olive trees but were stopped by Israeli soldiers (Reuters photo)

Greek role with Ocalan 'unforgivable'

ISTANBUL (R) — Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit on Saturday repeated an accusation that Greece sponsored terrorism, calling its behaviour in the case of Kurdish rebel chief Abdullah Ocalan "unforgivable."

Anadolu news agency said Ecevit was speaking in connection with the Greek decision to fly to Athens three Ocalan aides, who were stranded at the Greek embassy in Kenya after the rebel leader's capture in Nairobi last week.

"This behaviour is unforgivable. Greece has become a shelter and training centre for terrorists who want to divide Turkey. This is a crime against humanity," he said in a statement outside his office in Ankara.

Athens has already come under fierce attack from Ankara for sheltering Ocalan.

Turkey is holding him on treason charges, carrying a possible death penalty, for his role in the 14-year-old fight of the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) for self-rule in southeast Turkey.

More than 29,000 people have died in the conflict.

On Friday evening, the foreign ministry attacked Greece for sheltering the three women, who it described as PKK militants, saying it amounted to continued "support for terrorism."

"Greece must clearly and immediately cut its links with terrorism in order to become a country with which there can be normal relations," foreign ministry spokesman Sermet Atacani said in a statement.

Lockerbie relatives attack new ultimatum

LONDON (R) — British relatives of victims who died in the 1988 Lockerbie airliner bombing attacked on Saturday the British and U.S. decision to give Libya 30 days to handover the two main suspects.

Jim Swire, spokesman for some of the 270 people who died when the Pan Am airliner blew up over the Scottish town, accused Washington in particular of trying to wreck diplomatic efforts to bring the two men to trial.

"To issue this sort of ultimatum is to sabotage attempts at diplomacy which are on the brink of bearing fruit," he told Sky Television.

The U.S. and Britain told Libya on Friday it had a month to hand over the pair, but neither country said what would happen if

Tripoli refused. In August the two allies stopped insisting the Libyan suspects stand trial in either of their countries and proposed a trial before a Scottish court in the Netherlands.

Libya agreed in theory, but demanded clarification on a large number of points. Britain and Washington say the time for explanations now is over.

But Swire accused the U.S. of trying to isolate Libya and said the new ultimatum showed Washington had no interest in a Netherlands trial.

"I think it's counterproductive. The American position since the offer of a neutral country trial seems to have been to make these provocative interventions just when diplomacy seems to be making progress," he

told BBC radio. "I think it's high international politics and I regret very much that our campaign for truth and justice has become embroiled in it. I think it's a great tragedy," he said.

But he said he was still hopeful Libya would surrender the two men — said to be intelligence agents.

"I believe Libya couldn't possibly band them over just at the moment because it would appear to be caving in to American bullying tactics," he said.

"Once that settles down a bit, I think all her major problems have been honestly resolved and that it's in her interests as well as ours... that the two be handed over. So yes, I think it's very likely."

The Security Council on Friday completed its four-

month review of U.N. sanctions against Libya without discussing or making any changes.

Libya wants the measures lifted rather than suspended in exchange for any surrender of the suspects.

Envoys say the U.S. is proposing to impound some oil revenues. These are not currently touched under the sanctions which prohibit the sale of oil-related equipment for refineries and for transporting oil.

Jeremy Greenstock, Britain's ambassador to the U.S., hinted the U.S. idea might become a reality.

"I think the most important thing for Libya is to get out from under sanctions. That is the real pressure for Libya," he told BBC Radio.

Turkish human rights organisation under siege

By Harmonie Toros
The Associated Press

ANKARA — Seven bullet holes splinter the wooden door to the office of Turkey's leading human rights activist, a blunt reminder of the dangers of exposing violations in this country.

Akin Birdal, wounded in the May attack, now lives with 24-hour police protection — an ironic development given that the man who allegedly ordered the shooting has been linked to state death squads. In a nation where the defence of human rights is often associated with terrorism and subversion, the patriotic

fervour that has followed the capture of Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan has only made life more dangerous for activists.

Anonymous callers telephoned Birdal's independent human rights association to call the workers there "nation haters" and "terrorist supporters" after two members volunteered to defend Ocalan. One member of Ocalan's legal team has already resigned citing death threats to himself and his family.

But the threats and the assassination attempt against Birdal haven't stopped human rights activists from denouncing what they say are systematic

abuses of human rights in Turkey.

"If they don't cut my tongue, I will not stop talking," said Birdal, who was shot six times. The government says that Birdal's assailants, who were captured, worked for a man who was once part of a state-run death squad.

There is much to talk about. The U.S. State Department, in a report issued Friday, said that torture is widespread in Turkey. In January alone, security forces carried out at least 10 "extrajudicial executions" or tortured prisoners to death. Birdal's human rights group says. There

were another 100 cases of torture that were reported, according to the group.

Most of the reported violations, including the forced evacuation of three villages last month, occurred in the Kurdish-dominated south-east or were related to Turkey's war against Kurdish guerrillas. Treatment centres for torture victims say that electric shock, rape, and hanging by the arms are among the methods used by Turkish security forces. In one case cited in the State Department report, a 1/2-year-old Azat Tokmak, "was hanged with cigarettes and kicked in an effort to make the mother confess."

Police had suspected that the boy's mother was a member of the outlawed Kurdish Labour Party (PKK). Turkish authorities have admitted that violations occur, but insist that they are not systematic. They say that those suspected of abuse are brought to justice.

Turkey's poor human rights record has been a major stumbling block in Turkey's push to join the EU and the government is extremely sensitive to foreign criticisms of its security forces. And progress has been made.

Several policemen were tried last year on charges of abusing detainees during

interrogation. But most were acquitted or given light sentences. The government last year drew up detailed detention regulations and began special training in interrogation for law enforcement personnel. Torture is not the only human rights violation that is widely cited by international and Turkish human rights groups.

Freedom of speech is limited, they say.

In Turkey it is illegal for the country's approximately 12 million Kurds to broadcast or teach in Kurdish. Birdal is due to begin a one-year prison term in May for allegedly inciting racial hatred — simply by

calling for a peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem.

Many groups also question the independence of Turkey's courts.

Most violators of the country's draconian anti-terrorism law are tried in state security courts. The three-judge tribunals must contain one military officer. The European Court of Human Rights said the courts were not independent, given the military judge's presence. Turkey insists its courts are unbiased and independent.

Ocalan, who faces the death penalty, is to be tried before a security court on charges of treason. His

PKK has been battling for autonomy in southeast Turkey since 1984.

Andras Barsony, the Council of Europe's Human Rights monitor for Turkey, said Ocalan's trial will be a test case of the progress made by Turkey.

"If they don't work with us and they are not ready to be much more open, they could easily face sanctions," Barsony said. That could include a suspension of Turkey's membership in the Council of Europe.

"Turks are at a crossroad," he added. "They can look eastward, or they can look westward."

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

19:10 News headlines
19:35 Doc — Perspective
20:00 News in Arabic (Channel 2 links up with channel 1)
20:30 Programme on the late His Majesty King Hussein
21:00 Islamic History in Jordan
21:30 On the Banks of Jordan
22:00 News in English
22:10 Doc. — National Geographic
23:00 News in Arabic (Channel 2 links up with channel 1)

PRAYER TIMES

04:44 Fajr
06:01 (Sunrise) Duha
11:48 Dhur
15:03 Asr
17:35 Maghrib
18:52 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifeh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4634590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811.
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 4771751.
Armenian International Church Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweifeh Tel. 5920146
The United Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679
The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052
The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331
The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

seas calm.
Min./Max. temp.06/14
Aqaba11/21
Deserts04/18
Jordan Valley10/22

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 14 Aqaba 21. Humidity readings: Amman 33 per cent, Aqaba 42 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun03/10
Jerash05/16
Um Qays05/16
Madaba03/13
Petra04/14
Dead Sea11/22

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY
Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

SKIES will be partly cloudy with a chance of scattered showers in the eastern and southern parts of the Kingdom. Winds will be southeasterly to southwesterly moderate. In Aqaba, it will be rainy, cloudy, winds northerly moderate, and

AMMAN: Dr. Khalil Ramadan538723
Dr. Nidal Al Dahleh5827195
Dr. Sa'ad Tawfiq4788285
Dr. Hanna Mansour4750197

AMMAN: Firas Pharmacy5661912
Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730
Mayadah Pharmacy5537004

RUHA: Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID: Dr. Latif Al Shalabi (02)241788
Fou'ad Pharmacy (02)275360

ZARQA: Dr. Rafiq Atallah (05)994424
Palestine Pharmacy (05)983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre4637111
Civil Defence Department5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue4630341
Civil Defence Emergency199
Rescue Police 192 4621111 4637777
Fire Brigade4617101
Blood Bank4775121
Highway Police5343402
Traffic Police4896390
Public Security Dept.4630321
Hotel Complaints5605800
Price Complaints5661176
Water & Sewage Complaints4897467
Amman Municipality Complaints7871111
Telephone Information (directory assistance)121
Overseas Calls0132
Central Amman Telephone Repairs4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs5661101
Jordan Television4773111
Radio Jordan4774111
Water Authority5680100
J. Electricity Authority 5815615
Electric Power Co.4636381

RJ Flight Information 44-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS
AMMAN: The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery5921199
The Islamic Abdi5666131/7
Luznia Medical Centre5858656
Luznia4630195
Khaldi Maternity4644281/6
Akshid Maternity4644241/2
Jabal Amman Maternity4642562
Malhos, J. Amman4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani5607071
Shmeisani Hospital5607431
Jordan Hospital5607550
University Hospital5353444
Al-Muasher Hospital 5667227/9
Al-Ahli, Abdali5661646
Indian, Al-Muhajreen 4777101/3
Al-Bashir4775111/26
Army, Marka4891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital5157100
Amal Hospital5607155
Al Amal Cancer Centre5353000

ZARQA: Zarqa Govt. Hospital5983323
Zarqa National Hospital5900560
Ibn Sina Hospital59986731
Al Hikma Modern Hospital59990990

IRBID: Princess Basma Hospital5275555
Roman Catholic Hospital

Other Flights
14:35 Istanbul (TK)
18:00 Dubai, Damascus (EK)
18:40 Beirut (ME)
18:45 Kiev (6U)
19:05 Paris (AF)
20:25 Tel Aviv (LY)
20:40 Cairo (MS)
23:30 London, Beirut (BA)
23:35 Amsterdam (KL)
23:55 Larnaca (CY)
00:55 Bucharest (RO)
02:00 Rome (AZ)

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200 where it should always be verified. Information on other flights is obtained on telephone (44) 52700 or (44) 523250. Information on Royal Wings flights can be supplied on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS
Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
08:25 Bombay (RJ)
08:35 Jeddah (RJ)
08:50 Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)
09:00 Beirut (RJ)
09:50 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
16:40 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
17:40 Paris (RJ)

Other Flights
14:35 Istanbul (TK)
18:00 Dubai, Damascus (EK)
18:40 Beirut (ME)
18:45 Kiev (6U)
19:05 Paris (AF)
20:25 Tel Aviv (LY)
20:40 Cairo (MS)
23:30 London, Beirut (BA)
23:35 Amsterdam (KL)
23:55 Larnaca (CY)
00:55 Bucharest (RO)
02:00 Rome (AZ)

DEPARTURES

Royal Wings (RW) Flights
07:50 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
10:30 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
16:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
18:45 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights
08:15 Tel Aviv (arriving from QAIA) (RW)
08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
16:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)
20:30 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

Home

Government
investmePrime
Minister
Bulent
Ecevit
repeated
an accusation
that Greece
sponsored
terrorism,
calling its
behaviour in
the case of
Kurdish rebel
chief Abdullah
Ocalan "unforgivable."

Anadolu news agency said Ecevit was speaking in connection with the Greek decision to fly to Athens three Ocalan aides, who were stranded at the Greek embassy in Kenya after the rebel leader's capture in Nairobi last week.

"This behaviour is unforgivable. Greece has become a shelter and training centre for terrorists who want to divide Turkey. This is a crime against humanity," he said in a statement outside his office in Ankara.

Athens has already come under fierce attack from Ankara for sheltering Ocalan.

Turkey is holding him on treason charges, carrying a possible death penalty, for his role in the 14-year-old fight of the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) for self-rule in southeast Turkey.

More than 29,000 people have died in the conflict.

On Friday evening, the foreign ministry attacked Greece for sheltering the three women, who it described as PKK militants, saying it amounted to continued "support for terrorism."

"Greece must clearly and immediately cut its links with terrorism in order to become a country with which there can be normal relations," foreign ministry spokesman Sermet Atacani said in a statement.

Iraq, Jordan
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APR — Iraq
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of lower oil prices.

Senate to take up
draft laws

AMMAN (Petra) — The Upper House of Parliament will convene Monday under the chairmanship of President Zeid Riaydd and Prime Minister Fayez Tarabneh as well as Cabinet members. During the session, Parliament will discuss amended draft law of the Civil Servants' Pension Fund 1998, the draft law of the Jordanian Arab Academy for 1998, and the draft law of the University of Jordan for 1999.

House panel seeks
to help farmers

AMMAN (Petra) — The Rural and Badia Committee at Lower House of Parliament met today to discuss problems facing farmers as a consequence of the season's drought. Committee members asked government to grant the farmers soft loans with grace periods to help them cope with drought.

Government determined to remove barriers to investments, capital flow, says Tarawneh

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Faysal Tarawneh said Saturday that the government is determined to remove obstacles impeding capital flow to and investments in Jordan.

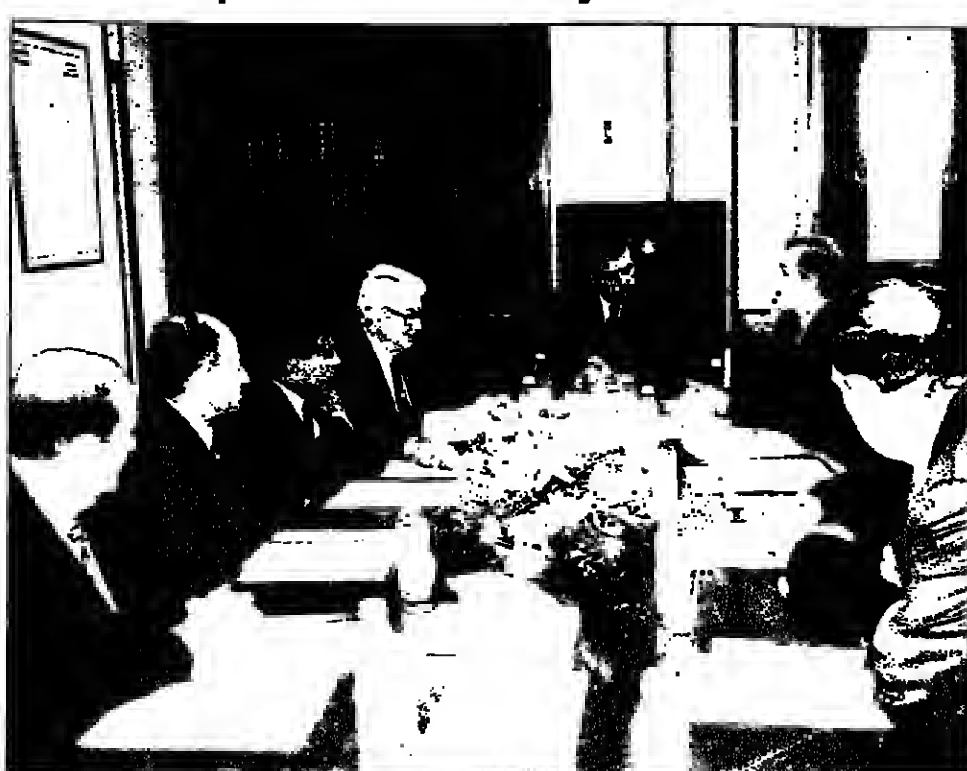
The premier said the government will not allow procedures and formalities to stand in the way.

Speaking to reporters following a visit to the Jordan Securities Commission where he reviewed investment measures, Tarawneh said non-Jordanian investment in the Amman Financial Market is increasing, and the market is witnessing growing Arab investment.

This is an indication of the economic stability of Jordan and sound investment legislation, added Tarawneh.

Answering questions about Jordan's relations with the Gulf states, the prime minister said ties between Jordan and the Gulf states in general, and Amman and Riyadh in particular, are very strong. He noted that Jordan's trade links with these countries are continuously progressing.

"We are looking forward to witnessing joint projects between Jordan and the Arab Gulf states and also towards opening the Gulf



Prime Minister Faysal Tarawneh Saturday meets with officials of the Jordan Securities Commission to discuss easing investment red tape (Petra photo)

countries' markets to Jordanian workers," said the prime minister.

At the meeting with JSC Chairman Bassam Saket, Tarawneh expressed the government's appreciation of the on going process of restructuring the system and work on promoting the capital market.

He said the reforms are bound to serve the national economy by helping to

attract investment and create the opportune investment climate in Jordan.

Tarawneh, who was accompanied by Minister of State for Development Affairs Taher Kanaan, said the government will continue to extend support to the commission's endeavours which aim to enhance the capital markets and boost local and foreign investment in Jordan's

national economy.

Tarawneh urged JSC officials to extend and increase the commission's interaction with Arab and international institutions to attract capital.

Saket reviewed the developments in the JSC and the new regulations designed to attract investment from the Arab and foreign business communities.

Opposition, independents send 'national plan' for reform to King

By Francesca Ciriaci

AMMAN — Independent political personalities and six opposition parties recently sent their proposal for a "national plan" for constitutional and democratic reforms to His Majesty King Abdullah, opposition sources said on Saturday.

The plan, which according to one source was sent to King Abdullah "a couple of days ago," calls for direct popular election of the prime minister and the establishment of a constitutional court — a measure required by the 1992 National Charter, but never implemented.

"Governance cannot be separate from accountability," said former Deputy Tuojan Faisal, one of the architects of the national plan. "The only way to hold governments accountable is to have direct popular elections for the prime minister."

Signatories of the "national plan" also asked for the abrogation of amend-

ments introduced in 1974 and 1976 to the original text of Article 73 of the 1952 Constitution.

These amendments gave the King authority to postpone general elections in cases of force majeure and discretion to hold partial elections in some constituencies only.

"[These amendments] were introduced through unconstitutional procedures and have paralysed parliamentary life for decades," Faisal told the Jordan Times.

Representatives of the forces behind the national plan believe that the dissolution of Jordan's current 13th Parliament and the convening of early elections should be "a natural consequence" of recent changes the Kingdom has undergone.

"There have been big and rapid changes at the top of the state," said one leftist politician, referring to the appointment of now-King Abdullah as Crown Prince on Jan. 25, the death of Jordan's beloved King Hussein on

Feb. 7, and the subsequent ascension to the Throne of the new King, as well as the appointment of HRH Prince Hamzah as Crown Prince.

"Early elections at this stage would only be natural," he added.

Signatories of the national plan include around 50 independent politicians — among whom are many former and serving deputies — the leftist Hashd party, headed by Salem Nahhas, the leftist Haq party, led by Mohammad Zo'bi, the Ansar party, led by Mohammad Majali, and the Jordanian Ba'ath Arab Socialist Party, headed by Tayseer Homsi.

Popular opposition leader Toujan Faisal is expected to officially launch Jordan's first liberal party, Al Ummat Al Fatah, in a few weeks, while another signatory of the national plan, Mazen Ryal, is also slated to register soon his new group, the Jordanian Citizens' Civil Rights Movement Party — already re-named as "Humat" — the Defenders.

Bank working hours to be determined by judiciary, says labour ministry

AMMAN (I.T.) — On the

eve of the application of the new working hours system at Jordanian banks, the Ministry of Labour said Saturday that the prerogative of determining working hours at banks lays with the judiciary.

Ministry sources said the Labour Court previously ruled, in disputes between bank managements and workers, that daily working hours are six and that the total weekly working hours he no more than 36 hours.

It also ruled that any extension of hours is overtime work and requires extra pay.

The sources said Article 59 of the Labour Law of 1996 stipulates that if workers willingly agree to work overtime hours, they are entitled to 125 per cent overtime payment.

Article 59 also states that Friday is the weekend.

The Central Bank of Jordan earlier this month circulated to local banks an order to observe a two-day weekend starting March 1, 1999. The banking week will be Sunday through Thursday, with Friday and Saturday as the designated holiday.

The CBI said working hours under the new arrangement will be from

8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., with banks open to the public from 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., with a half-hour lunch break. The total number of hours will be 40 a week up from 36.

The Union of Insurance and Bank Employees said they were pressing the government to introduce changes to the decision and have sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Faysal Tarawneh urging him to alter working hours so that bank employees start work at 8:00 a.m. and finish by 3:30 p.m.

Most of the country's 15,000 bank employees have expressed dissatisfac-

tion with the new working rules, and the union said they would be demanding overtime payment for the four extra working hours each week.

Furthermore, the union claims that women employees will suffer and might be forced to quit their jobs in view of the extended working hours which may disrupt family routines and childcare arrangements.

The union said it was insisting on opening a dialogue with the government and the Association of Banks in Jordan to reach a satisfactory settlement of this issue.

Iraq, Jordan renew trade accord but value reduced

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq and Jordan have renewed their trade protocol but reduced its value by a fifth due to the drop in oil prices, official media in both states said Saturday.

The protocol was signed Friday in Baghdad by Iraqi Commerce Minister Mohammad Mehdi Saleh and his Jordanian counterpart Mohammad Saleh Hourani, the official INA news agency said.

In Amman, Jordan Television said the protocol, whose value is based on Jordan's imports of Iraqi oil, was worth \$200 million, \$55 million less than in 1998.

The revised figure came at the instigation of Jordan, who wanted to take account of lower oil prices,

sources at the Ministry of Trade and Industry said.

Both states renewed their oil export agreement in January for 4.8 million tonnes of Iraqi crude over 1999, as in past years.

Half the oil is exported free, and the remainder is sold at below-market rates. The bilateral trade deal has been exempt from U.N. sanctions on Baghdad since the embargo was imposed following Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Jordan relies entirely on Iraq, its main trade partner, to meet its oil requirements.

The size of the protocol was previously reduced in 1996 from \$420 million to \$255 million due to the accumulation of Iraqi debt to Jordan.

Economic, trade team to head for talks in Yemen

AMMAN (Petra) — A large economic delegation led by Minister of Industry and Trade Mohammad Saleh Hourani will head for Yemen today for trade and economic talks.

Hourani will carry a message from His Majesty King Abdullah to Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh dealing with brotherly relations and also another message from Prime Minister Faysal Tarawneh to Yemeni Prime Minister Abdul Karim Ariyani.

The delegation includes representatives of the different Jordanian economic sectors in addition to representatives of 34 industrial institutions as well as Jordanian hospitals.

Ministry sources said discussions will focus on means of increasing the volume of trade between the two countries in imple-

mentation of trade and economic agreements signed by the Higher Joint Jordanian-Yemeni Committee which convened meetings in Amman last November.

Another topic for discussion is the preparation for the creation of a free trade zone and the implementation of a technical cooperation agreement, and joint investment projects as well as cooperation in the fields of health, higher education and the judiciary.

Hourani said Jordan's exports to Yemen in 1994 were worth JD7.3 million rising to JD30.4 million in 1997.

He added that Jordan will try to activate a trade centre which was opened in Sanaa in 1988 in order to promote Jordanian products there and will organise a trade fair, to help achieve that goal.

ENDING TOUR OF DUTY: Minister of Tourism Aqel Biltaji on Saturday receives Tunisian Ambassador, Hatem Ben Othman who is ending his tour of duty in Jordan. The pair discussed cooperation in the field of tourism, particularly an ongoing training programme for Jordanians in Tunisia. The first group of Jordanian trainees finished their training at the Tunisian Hotel Management Centres. Another group is scheduled to attend the programme in April (Petra photo)



Briefs

Salem Lawzi honoured

AMMAN (Petra) — A Royal Decree was issued Saturday bestowing Al Kawak Medal of the Second Order upon Director General of the Agricultural Marketing Corporation Salem Lawzi in appreciation of his long experience and work with the Ministry of Agriculture.

Senate to take up draft laws

AMMAN (Petra) — The Upper House of Parliament will convene Monday under the chairmanship of President Zeid Rifai and Prime Minister Faysal Tarawneh as well as Cabinet members. During the session, Parliament will discuss the amended draft law of the Civil Servants' Pension Fund for 1998, the draft law of the Jordanian Arab Academy for 1999 and the draft law of the University of Jordan for 1999.

House panel seeks to help farmers

AMMAN (Petra) — The Rural and Badia Committee at the Lower House of Parliament Saturday met to discuss problems facing farmers as a consequence of the season's drought. Committee members asked the government to grant the farmers soft loans with grace periods to help them cope with the drought.

U.S. report describes Jordan's 1998 human rights record as 'uneven'

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — In its annual human rights report the U.S. Department of State described Jordan's human rights record for 1998 as "uneven."

The Jordan Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998 released on Friday said significant human rights problems in the Kingdom remain, among them prolonged detention without charge, lack of due process of law and interference in the judicial process, infringement on citizens' privacy rights, harassment of members of political opposition parties and the press and significant restrictions on freedom of speech, press, assembly and association.

The report, released by the department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, emphasised several civil liberties violations, placing violations of free speech and press at the top of the section dedicated to civil liberties.

"The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and press," the report said. "However, the government imposes some restrictions on these rights."

The report alleges that the Press and Publications Law promulgated last September along with a new Jordan Press Association Law passed in July have imposed "stringent restraints on the operation of newspapers."

It further states that the government "intimidates journalists to self-censorship."

The report conceded that as of December 1998, no journalist had been brought to trial under the new law, but said that "the government routinely has used detention and prosecution or the threat of prosecution to intimidate journalists and encourage

self-censorship."

This month, the government moved its first case against a journalist under the 1998 Press and Publications Law.

Al Majd Chief Editor Fahd Rimawi was detained and released earlier this month. He is charged with publishing slanderous information about the Royal family, insulting the prime minister and members of the government and attacking the integrity of the security service.

Al Majd was ordered closed by the Court of First Instance earlier this month for the duration of the investigation into the case. The Court of Appeals last week overruled the first instance court decision to suspend the paper's publication. Rimawi is now awaiting trial.

The bureau cited several incidents in which free expression and free press had been hindered by government interference, among them, the confiscation in 1997 of 500 copies of a report published by a press freedoms group on press freedoms in Jordan and the government's forced closure of 13 weeklies for failing to meet "arbitrary capitalisation standards" dictated in the 1997 temporary amendments to the press law. It also listed the arrests of four journalists, one of whom the report alleges was verbally threatened and subjected to sleep deprivation while in custody.

The report also gave considerable coverage to institutionalised discrimination, particularly against women, who, the report said "are treated differently under the law, and may face discrimination in housing, employment and other areas."

Violence against women over the age of 15 was described by the report as "common," and reported cases do not reflect the full extent of the prob-

lem, the report said.

Familial and societal pressures discourage women seeking legal remedies against abuse although women retain the right to file complaints in court against spouses for abuse, it said.

The report alleges that "law enforcement treatment of men accused of honour crimes reflects a widespread unwillingness to condemn or take action against the problem."

It added that in 1998, more than 20 such murders were reported, although some experts believe the actual number of honour crimes may be four times as high as the number documented.

The report listed four cases in which men who committed "crimes of honour" enjoyed a reduced penalty for having killed a female in a fit of fury; a reduction in penalty not granted to women who kill under the same circumstances.

His Majesty the late King Hussein last year had ordered the government to rewrite legislation that would invoke heavy penalties for honour crimes. A special committee is now working on drafting a new law, according to government sources.

Other instances of institutionalised discrimination against women were also reported. For example, the report said, "women experience legal discrimination in matters of pension and social security benefits, inheritance, divorce and the value of court testimony...The government provides men with more generous social security benefits than women...[and] continues pension payments of deceased male civil servants to their heirs but discontinues payments of deceased female civil servants."

The report also pointed out that Jor-

danian women married to foreign men are not allowed to petition the state for their husbands' or childrens' citizenship.

"In practice, [this] may take years, and in many cases citizenship ultimately may still be denied to the husband and children," the report said. "Such children become stateless and lack the rights of citizen children, such as (the right) to attend school or seek other government services."

The report said that although civil law grants women equal pay for equal work, in the practice this is often not the case.

The Jordan report also elaborated on worker rights, highlighting the fact that domestic servants "do not have a legal forum to address their labour grievances and have no standing to sue in court for non-payment of wages" since they, along with agricultural labourers, are not covered by the 1996 Labour Law.

The report states that "complaints of beatings, insufficient food, and rape are generally not reported to officials by victims" for fear of losing working permits and of being returned to their home countries.

Two high profile incidents of questionable treatment of foreign labourers were discussed.

During last fall's police round up of several Asian and Arab labourers, the report alleges that 105 Filipino workers were arrested by security forces, transferred to jail and refused access to telephones to contact their employers. The report said that several other nationalities were treated in a similar manner although their precise numbers are unknown.

Also, the report said that authorities released no information about whether the employer of a 21-year old

Sri Lankan national would be charged with her abuse. The woman was admitted to Al Bashir Hospital in mid-November with lesions on her body, including infected burns, bloody and blackened eyes, welts on her stomach and back and unusual swelling of her hands and feet.

Finally, the report has stated that the "security services continue to be reluctant to conduct transparent investigations into allegations of wrongful deaths during police detention."

The report cited one case in which investigations into the death of a man held by security forces has not been carried out, in spite of a request to do so from Parliament.

The report also said that the government "did not allow an independent autopsy to be conducted to verify the government's claim that 7mm instead of vice 9mm ammunition had been used" in the shooting death of Mohammad Khatah, who was killed during altercations between security forces and Ma'an citizens demonstrating against U.S. action in Iraq in February 1998.

"Reports indicated that heavy handed behaviours by security forces was partly to blame for the violence" that ensued during a police operation to arrest two Masaseed tribesmen last March and resulted in the death of the two suspects, the report said. The incident led to a later clash in which "automatic gunfire was exchanged and three more Masaseed men were killed."

Finally, the report claimed that there have been no developments in the investigation of police officers involved in the "alleged wrongful deaths" of [three men] who died in police custody June 1995, December 1996 and June 1997.

Officials take steps to secure Nigeria's presidential election

LAGOS, Nigeria (AP) — Fifteen years after their last civilian leader was ousted in a military coup, Nigerians began the long-awaited process of electing a new president in the country's latest transition from military rule.

At outdoor polling stations in the commercial capital of Lagos, voters began lining up around 8 a.m. (0700 GMT) for accreditation, while on some street corners, groups of exuberant young men shared bottles of palm wine, singing and chanting party slogans.

Voting began at 11:30 a.m. (1030 GMT) and was expected to continue until 2:30 p.m. (1330 GMT). Early results could be released by late Saturday, and a winner was expected to be declared sometime Sunday.

There were no reports of violence Saturday morning, and police and soldiers patrolled the city streets to prevent anti-government fringe groups from carrying out threats to disrupt the ballot.

The election pits retired Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo against former Finance Minister Olu Falae. Both were political prisoners under the late military ruler Gen. Sani Abacha, whose sudden death last June set off the transition to civilian rule.

Nigeria, an ethnically divided country with large oil reserves but extreme poverty, has been plundered of its riches by successive military bosses. Its last experiment with democracy, the 1993 presidential elections, was cancelled by the military.

This time, Nigerian citizens and Abacha's replacement, Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar, say they are determined to return to civilian rule.

Abubakar decided not to vote after a journalist pointed out that he had arrived at an Abuja polling station a few minutes late for accreditation, which ended at 11 a.m. (1000 GMT).

Abubakar repeated his vow to resign and hand over



Nigerians living in the southwest Yoruba region of the country cast their votes in the February 27 presidential elections, Nigeria, which has been ruled by military leaders for all but 10 years since it's independence in 1960, held elections nationwide (Reuters photo)

power to the election winner and said he would not enter politics.

"I'm resigning from the army," he said. "I've put in my best for my country, and I'm going home to rest."

Although it was not immediately known how many of the estimated 40 million registered voters had turned out, visits by journalists and observers to voting stations in Lagos, the capital, Abuja, and the western city of Ibadan indicated

significantly higher participation than in local, state and legislative elections.

Those elections had been marked by widespread apathy and accusations of vote-buying and ballot-box stuffing.

"Today will be better in every way," said former U.S. President Jimmy Carter during a visit to a polling station in Abuja. Carter is leading a delegation of election observers from his Atlanta-based

Carter Centre and the National Democratic Institute.

Obasanjo, the front-runner, is the only Nigerian military ruler to voluntarily hand over power to an elected civilian. But President Shehu Shagari was overthrown four years later in another military coup in Dec. 1983.

Obasanjo has long-standing ties to Nigeria's powerful northern elite, whose connections and funding

have helped create a strong political machine that appears to have overwhelmed Falae.

But his military background has made his people's democratic party unpopular among many of his own tribe, the Yorubas of south-western Nigeria, who have long chafed under army rule.

"We don't want anybody from the military in the places of power," said Hassan Maademi, a Lagos fashion designer lining up to vote. "We want someone who cares about schools and hospitals."

Falae, a Yale University-trained economist, respected technocrat and former banker, has the support of the country's other two parties, the all peoples party and the alliance for democracy.

He is best known for backing a stringent and unpopular programme to restructure Nigeria's economy — pushed by international lending institutions but eventually abandoned by the military government.

Although Falae has called for a peaceful transition, a few of his more radical Yoruba supporters, especially from the militant Odunda group, have openly threatened violence if their candidate loses.

"If Obasanjo wins, we will riot," said Bashir Akinsinu, swinging palm wine with a group of young men chanting and dancing in the Lagos island neighbourhood of Ajale. "It's win or war."

As voters in colourful robes and head-dresses lined up at a polling station in Lagos' crowded working-class neighbourhood of Ojara, a local Yoruba chief appealed for calm and asked his followers to respect the results of the vote, whoever wins.

"We don't want any trouble," Falae Aromire said, lounging on a grass mat in the courtyard of his crumbling concrete-pillared palace. "We leave the results of the elections in God's hands."

Peace forum concerned about nuclear arms race in S. Asia

KARACHI (AFP) — Last year's nuclear tests by India and Pakistan triggered a mad race for weapons of mass destruction, a forum aimed at promoting peace between the two rivals heard Saturday.

The Pakistan peace conference, formed by several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to foster a spirit of détente between Pakistan and India, opened a two-day session here.

Some 400 delegates from Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and European countries are participating in the meeting.

"The nuclear tests have only unleashed a mad arms race," Human Rights Commission of Pakistan Chairperson I.A. Rehman told the gathering.

"We must not dismiss the danger of a nuclear holocaust," Rehman said, adding that "even if nuclear weapons are not used, their presence in a country causes grave harm to the state and the civil society."

The meeting follows last week's landmark summit in Lahore between Indian and Pakistani premiers, Atal Behari Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif.

The leaders agreed to take steps to reduce the risk of nuclear conflict and to intensify efforts to resolve disputes dividing the two countries.

Indian MP Nirmala Deshpande told the meeting that with the nuclear threat becoming a reality, "people need to be made aware of the dangers of nuclear weapons."

Deshpande said a peace march should be held from New Delhi to Lahore to generate an atmosphere of peace between the neighbours.

Conference convener B.M. Kutty urged a collective struggle by the peoples in South Asia against nuclearisation.

NEWS IN BRIEF

U.N. peace envoy to visit Kabul

KABUL (AFP) — United Nations special envoy for Afghanistan Lakhdar Brahimi is to visit Kabul as part of his peacemaking endeavours, official sources here said Saturday. Brahimi, who is currently in Pakistan, will arrive on Sunday for a day of meetings with Taliban authorities. The envoy last visited Afghanistan in October when he met with Taliban chief Mullah Mohammad Omar in the southern city of Kandahar in a bid to defuse tensions between the Islamic militia and Iran. The Algerian diplomat on Monday held talks with Pakistani Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz about forging a truce between the Taliban and the Afghan opposition based in the north. They exchanged views on the possibility of convening a proposed meeting of six Afghan neighbours plus the United States and Russia in the Uzbek capital Tashkent at a date to be decided later, sources said. Besides the U.S. and Russia, the so-called "six plus two" group also includes Pakistan, Iran, China, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

Mandela to make election date known next week — Mbeki

KIMBERLEY, South Africa (AFP) — President Nelson Mandela will next week make known the date for South Africa's second democratic election, Deputy President Thabo Mbeki said while electioneering here Saturday. Mbeki said Mandela was free to disclose the date following the conclusion Friday of a court case in which the official opposition challenged an electoral rule restricting the vote to citizens with new, bar-coded identity documents. SABC public radio reported, Mandela two weeks ago hinted that the election would take place on a day between May 18 and 27, but on advice from his lawyer he refrained from making a long-awaited public statement. The South African constitution prevents Mandela from officially proclaiming the date before the expiry of the mandate of the present government in early May. He is not, however, compelled to wait until then to make the date known less officially, constitutional authorities said this week. The election must be held before the end of July.

German soldiers questioned in connection with fatal shot

WARSAW (AP) — Police were questioning 10 German soldiers Saturday in connection with a fatal shot that killed a 49-year-old railworker, Polish media reported. The man was shot in the head Friday afternoon, at a train station in Koniecpol, about 200 kilometres south of Warsaw, around the same time a train carrying German soldiers was passing through the station. "There is suspicion that a coincidental shot was fired from the train," Defence Ministry spokesman Eugeniusz Mieczak told Radio Zet. He said that the bullet went through the door of a small workshop, striking the railworker standing inside. Mieczak said police, military police and the prosecutor's office formed two teams to investigate the incident. One was questioning German soldiers in a nearby city of Lubliniec, where the train was stopped. The other team was working on the site. Investigators refuse any further details. The radio report said the bullet has been found, but so far there was no proof that the shot was fired from the train. A German defence ministry spokesman in Bonn said that Polish police and prosecutors were investigating whether soldiers accompanying an equipment transport were involved in the shooting. The soldiers were assigned to a train carrying tanks and trucks back to Germany from a joint Polish-German military manoeuvre in Nowa Deba. Investigators are questioning the soldiers and checking their weapons, the spokesman said.

Crisis pushes up number of divorces in Central Java district

JAKARTA (AFP) — The number of divorces has risen ten-fold in one district of Central Java because of Indonesia's economic crisis, a report said Saturday. The chief of the religious court in Tegal, H. Bisri, was quoted by the Jakarta Post as saying the number of divorce cases registered at his office had soared from 30 a month before the crisis to 300 now. "We are sure this development is caused by the crisis because 90 percent of the cases were lodged by wives complaining about absent or unemployed husbands," Bisri said. He said that in most cases, the husband left the wife to seek work elsewhere but failed to return after a long period or say where he was. The crisis has brought the economy to a near halt, forcing millions into unemployment and poverty.

'German foreign minister to marry in April'

BONN (AFP) — German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, 50, is to marry girlfriend Nicola Leske, 29, in early April, the weekly Focus magazine due on Monday said. The marriage will be the fourth for the chief of the Greens Party, which is the Social Democrat's ruling coalition partner. Fischer will be able to count Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine among his wedding guests, Focus said.

Sydney gay parade attracts over half-million Australians

SYDNEY (R) — A two-hour parade celebrating Australia's gay community attracted more than half a million people to the streets of Sydney on Saturday. The city's 21st Annual Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras featured a steady stream of mostly men in leather and lycra hot pants dancing and swerving to a constant beat of disco songs through central Sydney's main gay quarter. As in past years, many of the parade-goers brought their families and stood on plastic milk crates to gain a vantage point as the floats made their way along a 2.5 km path. Monica Lewinsky look-alikes were everywhere and a group of 48 Shirley Bassey impersonators in gold evening dresses performed a "hey big spender" routine. The annual event, which last year attracted 5,000 overseas visitors, usually finishes with night-long dance parties.

Two Albanians killed as Yugoslav army conducts 'exercises'

LIKOVAC, Yugoslavia (AFP) — Yugoslav tanks punched at rebel positions Saturday in northern Kosovo, with Kosovo Albanian sources reporting two dead in what Belgrade was calling a "winter exercise."

Sustained tank fire could be heard clearly in this Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) command centre, coming from the direction of the snow-covered Cicavica hills, northwest of Kosovo's capital, Pristina.

KLA sources said Serbian forces — which had been clashing in the area for several days, despite an October cease-fire and an ongoing peace process — had advanced as far as Ostjane village, where fighting was under way. There was no immediate independent confirmation.

The OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) in Pristina said significant numbers of Yugoslav army troops were moving south on Saturday.

"Twenty kilometres south of Belgrade, a convoy of 15 armoured troop transports, 15 anti-aircraft guns loaded on trucks and 15 other anti-aircraft guns were seen moving towards the south," KVM spokeswoman Beatrice Lacoste said.

According to the Kosovo Information Centre (KIC), two ethnic

Albanians were killed and a third was injured in clashes between Serb security forces and ethnic Albanians in northern Kosovo.

Serb forces stationed in the villages of Svinjare, near Vucitrm, and Doljak, some 40 kilometres north of Pristina, have been "bombarding the villages of Ostjane, Pirc, Pantina, Gornja and Donja Vaganica since Friday at 4:00 p.m. (1500 GMT)," the KIC said.

The identities of the two ethnic Albanians killed were not known, as police had removed their bodies, the information centre said. The pair were from the village of Donja Vaganica.

Serb sources in Pristina said the two victims were wearing KLA uniforms. The KLA is fighting for independence of the Serbian province.

The KIC said residents of the village of Doljak had fled that town, and only four elderly people remained.

On Saturday morning, Serb forces "bombarded" the village of Lapastica, a KLA stronghold in the northern Podujevo region, the KIC said. The KVM said the Yugoslav army was continuing its "exercises" in northern Kosovo, where "several rounds" of tank and mortar fire were heard Friday evening, in particular near the village of Doljak.

"We don't know if there was an exchange of fire. The army was perhaps carrying out night firing exercises," Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe spokesman Walter Ebenberger said.

Meanwhile, Albanian President Rexhep Meidani on Saturday urged ethnic Albanians to "speak with one single voice" when peace negotiations on Kosovo resume in France on March 15, his spokesman Sotirag Hroni said.

He openly criticised KLA political representative Adem Demaci, accusing him of adopting "a different attitude from the others, during and after the talks in Rambouillet," France.

"We hope that he (Demaci) will change his point of view and support the joint stance on all the Kosovo Albanian issues," Hroni said.

The spokesman said Meidani was playing an "important role" in the pursuit for ethnic Albanian unity. "From now on, we will have to search together for the best alternative for Kosovo," he said.

'Bosnian Serb military involved in weapons smuggling'

SARAJEVO (AFP) — NATO troops have seized rocket launchers and other weapons this week that were apparently smuggled into northern Bosnia by members of the Serb republic's military, according to a statement released by SFOR Saturday.

An investigation carried out by the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) has turned up information that "implicates some VRS (Serb Republic Army) personnel," the statement said.

"The apparent involvement of the VRS makes this a very serious issue," it said adding that the identities and positions of the personnel involved would not be released as the investigation was ongoing.

SFOR will pursue the investigation "wherever it leads, seeking to expose criminal activity and corruption regardless of who may be implicated," the statement added.

The troops seized two civilian trucks carrying rocket systems, including three multiple rocket launchers and air defences systems, Wednesday near the northern town of Brcko.

The investigation into this seizure led SFOR troops to uncover Friday a large cache of weapons in a private warehouse in the northeast Bosnian town of Bijeljina.

The weapons seized in Bijeljina included 30 kilos of plastic explosives, 22 light anti-tank weapons,

ten mortars and 58 sub machine guns.

SFOR denied speculation by Bosnian Serb Radio that the weapons may have been destined for Kosovo, where tensions between ethnic Albanians and Serbian troops are high.

Under the Dayton peace agreement that ended Bosnia's 1992-1995 war, SFOR has the authority to "remove army officers who are not maintaining professional standards," SFOR spokesman Lieutenant Commander David Scanlon told AFP.

But Scanlon said Bosnian Serb authorities were expected to take the appropriate action against the smugglers.

Belgrade trying to drag Macedonia into Kosovo conflict — officials

SKOPJE (AFP) — Serbs are shelling ethnic Albanian villages near the Macedonian border in a bid to push refugees across it and widen the conflict in southern Yugoslavia, sources close to the government said here Saturday.

The state-run Macedonian Radio announced late Friday that at least 500 Albanians — mostly women and children from the Kacanik region — had been chased by Serb police and soldiers across the border from southern Kosovo.

The Serb objective is to drag Macedonia into the con-

flict by creating a population of refugees here," said Alahjedin Demiri, a former mayor of Tetovo, which lies near the border, west of the capital.

Emad Fajzulahu, an ethnic Albanian minister in the coalition centre right government, said recent Albanian-Macedonian clashes in Skopje were due to "to Serb secret service manipulation, aimed at destabilising Macedonia."

Hundreds of ethnic Albanians cross the border daily, but only 1,200 have claimed to be refugees, according to the U.N. High

Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

The others, said to number in the thousands, stay for a short time in Macedonia, then return to Kosovo as soon as fighting there dies down.

Albanians in Macedonia, who make up about one third of the country's population, generally support independence for Kosovo, while ethnic Slavs often express sympathy for the neighbouring Serbs.

But the two groups manage to live relatively peacefully side-by-side in the republic, which covers some 27,000 square kilometres.

U.S. critical of China, Serbia, Taleban on rights

WASHINGTON (R) — Human rights in China and Serbia deteriorated sharply in 1998, the United States said on Friday in its annual human rights report.

The report, covering 194 countries, included blistering attacks on the Taleban Muslim faction that rules most of Afghanistan for its treatment of women and on NATO ally Turkey for torture, harassment of the press and intolerance towards the Kurdish minority.

Assistant Secretary of State Henry Koh, who handles human rights issues, said there was a disturbing trend that "in too many countries, leaders speak of democracy, yet rig elections, suppress dissent and shake the press."

In testimony before Congress, he also expressed concern about "widespread abuse of civilians trapped in conflict, particularly in countries facing civil war."

The annual U.S. reports often provoke an angry reaction from targeted countries, which accuse the sole superpower of lecturing the world to adopt its own standards and of hypocrisy, with critics pointing to U.S. use of the death penalty and reports of police brutality.

The report did not include a section on rights observance in the United States. But Koh defended it as an honest effort in truth-telling based on "common neutral standards."

He acknowledged the U.S. death penalty is controversial but said such a punishment is permitted under international law if meted out in accord with rigorous protections.

On China, the 1998 report was more robust than last year's version, which eased U.S. criticism of Beijing.

It said Beijing's human rights record "deteriorated sharply... with a crackdown against organised political opposition."

China was cited for "sharp

limits of freedom of expression and association" in detaining dozens of political activists who tried to register a political party and in "harsh sentences in closed trials" given to three leaders that "flagrantly violated due process."

Representative Chris Smith, a New Jersey Republican who chairs a House of Representatives subcommittee on human rights, said the report softened its criticism of Beijing with its inclusion of "irrelevant and gratuitous" comments on the progress of China's economy and improved living standards.

The conclusions highlight an upsurge in serious problems the Clinton administration is having with China and were made public just as Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was to leave for Beijing for important talks with Chinese officials.

Issued 50 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed all humans are "free and equal in dignity and rights," the 5,000-page report said the world "still has a long way to go" to fulfil the declaration's promises.

Human rights in Serbia, Yugoslavia's dominant republic, also "deteriorated sharply in 1998," the report said.

It accused the regime of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic of using the military, police, judiciary and state-controlled media to strangle dissent and promote a brutal crackdown on civilians and separatist insurgents in Kosovo.

By year's end, the violence in Kosovo left about 2,000 mostly unarmed ethnic Albanian civilians dead, displaced about 180,000 people and "triggered the worst regional and political military crisis in Europe" since the Bosnia war, it said.

The State Department, underscoring an increasing focus on women's rights,

said Afghanistan "represented perhaps the most severe abuse of women's human rights in the world." It faulted the Islamist faction known as the Taleban for publicly beating women who failed to wear the all-enveloping "burqa" head and body covering and for not being accompanied by a close male relative.

It accused the Taleban of "devastating disregard for the physical and psychological health of women and girls," including drastically limiting access to medical services.

Barred from working outside the home, many women had to beg on the streets to feed their children when they became the sole breadwinner during the country's civil war, the report said.

The Taleban was also faulted for massacring hundreds of people when their forces captured Mazar-i-Sharif last year.

On Turkey, the report cited a "general recognition, including by the government, that the country's human rights performance is inadequate and needs to be brought in line."

Indicting police and security forces, it said jail beating deaths and disappearances continued and torture, widespread.

Some U.S. human rights groups questioned whether the report shielded U.S. allies from some criticism that was readily aimed at other countries.

Many traditional targets come in for repeated criticism of overall human rights, including Burma, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Libya. North Korea, despite economic disaster, continued brutally repressive measures to silence dissent, it said.

The report said China continued to exercise control over all aspects of Cuban life and "suppress ruthlessly all forms of political dissent."

Albright faces rough ride in China

By Jonathan Wright

SAN FRANCISCO (R) — U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is in for a rough ride in China next week amid a series of disputes over issues from human rights to satellite exports and Balkan peace-keeping.

When Albright lands in Beijing on Sunday evening, starting a two-day visit to China and a six-day tour of Asia, much of the goodwill from President Bill Clinton's visit to China last year will have dissipated, the victim of the hard reality that much divides and little unites these two big nations.

This last week saw a sudden spate of tiffs, none of them directly related to Albright's visit but each of them adding to the sense that China and the United States can never agree.

First, the Clinton administration vetoed the sale of \$450 million worth of telecommunications satellites to China, saying the Chinese military was part of the hiving consortium.

China lashed out at the decision on Thursday and also denounced the idea of a proposed U.S. missile defence system to protect Taiwan, Japan and South Korea.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue voiced "strong resentment" at the satellite veto and said the U.S. security concerns cited for stopping the sale were groundless.

"(It) will have a negative effect on normal China-U.S. economic and trade exchanges and cooperation," she added.

Then China vetoed on Thursday an extension for the U.N. peacekeeping force in Macedonia, putting a spoke in Washington's Balkan policy at a sensitive time in negotiations on the future of neighbouring Kosovo.

The United States said it regretted the Chinese decision, which was in retaliation for Macedonian recognition of Taiwan.

The veto undermines an operation Washington sees as a valuable contribution to stability in south-eastern Europe.

Human rights, a perennial irritant in Sino-American relations, hit the headlines on Friday with the purely coincidental release of the State Department's annual report.

It said China's record deteriorated sharply in 1998, with severe limits on freedom of expression and association, the detention of dozens of political activists

who tried to register a political party and harsh sentences in closed trials for three pro-democracy leaders.

The Western press has added fuel to the flames, despite the Clinton administration's attempts to put a damper on the fire.

Newspapers have made much of a Pentagon report on China deploying hundreds of missiles on the coast facing Taiwan but the U.S. administration said this was no sudden development.

The London-based Financial Times said on Friday that China had made a veiled threat to transfer missile technology to third countries if Washington ever provides a missile defence shield to Taiwan and China's other neighbours.

A senior Chinese official, who declined to be identified, was quoted as saying that installation of such a system would violate the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), which aims to curb the spread of sensitive missile technology.

"Since the U.S. can lead the way in breaking this (MTCR) regime, other countries have an absolute right not to follow the rules of this regime and undertake

cooperation on missiles and missile technology with third countries," he said.

Chinese cooperation on missile transfers has been one of the relatively few successes the Clinton administration has to show from its policy of strategic dialogue with China.

Albright, addressing members of Congress sceptical of he China policy this week, brought it up along with China's cooperation on nuclear and chemical weapons treaties, its support for Korean peace talks and its "responsible role" in declining to devalue during the Asian financial crisis.

That does not convince some members of Congress, but U.S. officials say these disputes alone do not justify any reconsideration of the approach to China.

Assistant Secretary of State Stanley Roth, who is travelling with Albright, said this month that dialogue should be more productive than the sterile shouting matches of the past.

He added: "many experts consider China the greatest foreign policy challenge facing the U.S. today, and with good reason."

China's remarkable economic achievements, increasing diplomatic prominence and growing

military strength over the course of the past decade have made the utility of constructing a cooperative relationship with China all the more pressing.

A senior State Department official last week tried to play down the probable impact of the latest disputes, an attitude echoed in Beijing by Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang.

The U.S. official said that the satellite veto was "not a major issue" because it did not mean a change in U.S. policy and that Friday's human rights report would have no impact on Albright's visit because the Chinese had known it was coming.

"There is still good momentum for the improvement and development of relations, and that is why we attach importance to the visit by Secretary of State Albright," said Zhang.

Other perennials — Tibet, the massive imbalance of trade and Chinese membership of the World Trade Organisation — will also be on the agenda for Albright, who is helping prepare for Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji's visit to Washington in April.

Avalanche victims flown out of death valley

By Katinka Mezei
Agence France Presse

GALTUER, Austria — The bodies of 38 avalanche victims were Saturday flown out of the Austrian valley where the tragedy struck, ahead of a service in their memory.

The memorial service is planned for Sunday in the Tyrolean capital Innsbruck after the body of the last victim — a girl aged between 12 and 16 whose parents died in the snowslide — was found Saturday.

Officials had vowed not to hold the service until they had found all the victims among the ruins of houses devastated by a massive snowslide in Galtuer last Tuesday, army spokesman Thomas Schoenherr told AFP.

A total of 38 people died in the snowslides in Galtuer followed barely 24 hours later by one in neighbouring Valzur, the worst avalanche tragedy in Austria for over four decades.

Rescuers worked day and night to find the victims. Twenty-two were German, eight Austrian, six Dutch and two Danish, unofficial reports said.

After the last of the victims was flown out of the valley the first group of reporters arrived in the village by helicopter. An airlift attempt to reach it by bus was thwarted by a



A monk kneels down in front of the avalanche victims' coffins as they are lined up inside Innsbruck's Wilten basilika. A memorial service will take place today for the 38 people killed when two massive avalanches hit the ski resorts of Galtuer and Valzur in Tyrol's Paznaun valley earlier this week (Reuters photo)

fresh avalanche. Tyrolean Governor Wendelin Weingartner had forbidden any press visits until all the bodies had been recovered.

The coffins were to be taken to a memorial service at the Wilten Church in Innsbruck, with the bodies of the eight Austrians returned to Galtuer for burial.

Meanwhile, the road into the Paznaun Valley, blocked off for over a week by snow, was partially opened, and access to Galtuer and Valzur where the snowslides hit was due to be open later Saturday, officials said.

The sombre task of evacuating the bodies came after a three-day airlift operation which flew out some 10,000

tourists from the entire valley, blocked by fierce snowstorms since before last weekend. On Saturday officials opened the road into the valley as far as the resort of Ischgl, about two-thirds of the way to Galtuer, according to the APA news agency.

They warned, however, that it might be closed again later in the day as continuing warm weather was melting snow on the surrounding mountainsides, increasing the risk of fresh avalanches.

Helicopters were still on standby, though nine U.S. Blackhawks and six German aircraft which aided the evacuation were due to return to base Saturday.

Condolences have poured in from world

leaders including Britain's Queen Elizabeth, Russian President Boris Yeltsin and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder in the wake of the Tyrolean tragedy.

The rescue operation has been clouded by accusations that authorities ignored warnings just days ahead of the deadly snowslides.

Officials strenuously deny this.

"Everyone can be clever in retrospect. But nobody expected this kind of once-a-century event," said Tyrol Governor Wendelin Weingartner, after a Tyrolean TV weatherman advised authorities last week to evacuate people.

"I warned about the catastrophic situation,"

Erhard Berger was quoted by the daily Kurier as saying. "On Friday evening I was at a crisis meeting of the provincial governor and also made the warning there," he added.

The Austrian double avalanche tragedy was the centre of one of the most deadly weeks in Europe's Alpine region for decades, including deaths in France and Switzerland where thousands of tourists were also stranded.

Despite the danger, the Tyroleans of the Galtuer region said they would not leave their homes. Michael Holding, 62, a pensioner who has lived his whole life in the area, said: "We grew up with danger of avalanches. It's the daily life of mountain people."

Yeltsin back in hospital with ulcer

By Peter Graff
Reuters

MOSCOW — Russian President Boris Yeltsin was back in hospital on Saturday receiving new treatment for a stomach ulcer, the latest in a series of ailments that have all but sidelined him for several months.

Yeltsin suffered the new health setback even as he has been trying to stage a comeback, increasing his public appearances and making a determined effort to show he is still in charge.

Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Yakushkin said Yeltsin was confined to Moscow's elite Central Clinical Hospital after doctors decided during an examination on Saturday morning that further treatment was needed.

"He should spend at least the next few days there," Yakushkin told Reuters. He added: "He is undergoing treatment. He feels okay."

A spokeswoman for Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov said the premier had gone ahead with plans to leave Moscow for a 10-day holiday on the Black Sea, his first vacation since taking office in September.

Yakushkin had said earlier this week that Yeltsin had completed his rehabilitation from the ulcer, for which he was treated with drugs in hospital for nearly two weeks in January.

The ulcer was the latest in a series of complaints, including bronchitis, exhaustion and pneumonia, which have kept the president out of public view for much of the past five months.

He had quintuple heart bypass surgery in November 1996. Since Primakov took office, the premier has overseen most of Russia's day-to-day affairs, standing in for Yeltsin on high profile foreign trips to Europe and Asia while the president has been sidelined by illness.

But Yeltsin, 68, has jealously guarded the wide powers granted to him by the 1993 constitution and hristled at suggestions his authority is waning.

The Kremlin has said that he is still

in control of the country's nuclear arsenal. Yakushkin said Yeltsin spoke by telephone to Primakov from his hospital room on Saturday afternoon and told the premier, his constitutional understudy, that it was alright for him to leave Moscow and take his holiday.

Yakushkin said they also discussed Primakov's meeting on Saturday morning with a visiting delegation from the World Bank, as well as other official matters. He gave no details.

In recent weeks Yeltsin has tried to increase his profile, visiting his Kremlin office more frequently and making efforts to greet foreign visitors in Moscow. He also defied doctors' orders by going to Jordan for the funeral of King Hussein.

This week, in a joint television appearance with Primakov, Yeltsin vowed to stay on as president until his term ends in mid-2000, and said Primakov, who is a year older than his boss, had promised to remain as premier.

Both men said they were angered by suggestions that Primakov wanted Yeltsin's job.

Yeltsin appeared in public on Tuesday to lay flowers at Russia's memorial to the unknown soldier, the first time he had been seen out in the open in months. On Thursday he met visiting Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji in the Kremlin and on Friday he headed a summit in Moscow with presidents of four other former Soviet republics.

War Crimes Tribunal may start operating in 3 to 5 years

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The world's first permanent War Crimes Tribunal will probably start operating in three to five years — and most countries want the United States on board, the key organiser said Friday.

Over U.S. objections, 120 countries approved the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court last July. It has since been signed by 76 nations, most recently Haiti, and ratified by one: Senegal.

The court, which will prosecute individuals for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and aggression, will go into effect when 60 countries have ratified it.

"I would assess entry into force between say three and five years," said Philippe Kirsch, who chairs the preparatory commission for the tribunal that ended two weeks of meetings at the United Nations Friday.

The United States voted against the treaty because American officials felt it yielded too much prosecutorial power to the new court, leaving U.S. troops and citizens vulnerable to politically motivated prosecutions.

But U.S. officials participated in the preparatory meeting, offering proposals on the two priority issues discussed: developing rules of procedure and evidence for the court and determining the elements that constitute the

crimes to be prosecuted.

Some human rights groups accused the United States of trying to weaken the court's clout — or possibly destroy it.

But Kirsch called their conclusion "premature." "The atmosphere is very good," he said. "After two weeks, all indications are all parties involved in those discussions are trying to make progress and to reach a general agreement — but it is very slow." Kirsch said he intends to appoint an individual to take charge of exploring with all delegations over the next few months the U.S. objections to the treaty.

"My sense is that most countries consider that a court with United States support would obviously be stronger," he said.

"I think the general intention is to talk to the United States to see whether and how the U.S. concerns could be accommodated." The United States is a permanent member of the Security Council, which can trigger jurisdiction of the court.

The preparatory commission, which must finish its work by June 30, 2000, must also tackle the unfinished business of the Rome conference and define the crime of aggression.

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Playing their cards right

BAGHDAD'S OFFER to hold an unconditional dialogue with Riyadh and Kuwait to settle their long-standing disputes stemming from Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait in 1990 should be taken up by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in order to examine the extent of the sincerity of the Iraqi regime in seeking a new era of inter-Arab ties. It is unfortunate that the Iraqi government did not use last month's Arab foreign ministers' meeting in Cairo to promote bona fide contacts with all Arab capitals especially Riyadh and Kuwait. Instead of seeking a modus vivendi with the Arab World, Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Al Sahhaf, used the Cairo meeting to blast several Arab governments and their heads of state. Now under renewed pressure from Washington and London and fearing an armed offensive by U.S. and British armies, Baghdad is knocking at the doors of several Arab capitals soliciting support.

Iraq has always been able to gain Arab and non-Arab support over its concern that certain major capitals may be aiming to divide the Arab country. No Arab country, no matter to what extent at loggerheads it may be with the Iraqi regime, would tolerate Iraq's division. The Iraqi authorities would be better advised to promote an Arab and international consensus against an invasion of Iraq or the division of the country as priority issues. Ankara has already voiced deep anxiety over a possible intervention in Iraq and warned that such an aggression would lead to a Vietnam-like situation. Turkey has also opposed the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq for fear that such a step would inevitably lead to the creation of a Kurdish entity in its eastern region.

His Majesty King Abdullah has warned in a recent interview that Jordan will never allow itself to serve as a springboard for an intervention in Iraq or anywhere else in the Middle East. Baghdad would do itself a great deal of good, therefore, by concentrating for the time being on these common denominators before setting off on other policy objectives no matter how legitimate they may be. Improving relations with the Arab Gulf states, especially Riyadh and Kuwait, would go a long way to frustrate all foreign designs on Iraq's territorial integrity.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Fahed Fanek commented on the two-day holiday, saying the "luxurious" weekend will negatively affect the national economy and public interest at a time where there has been excessive talk of "well-calculated" decisions, increasing productivity and combating demonstrative incompetence. Fanek said the private and public sectors will be the first to suffer since they will have to work extra hours to compensate for the holiday. Most of the women, who form one-third of the banking personnel, are married and will not be able to work until 5 p.m. Fanek added that the only beneficiaries are probably the ministers who spend one day in Parliament and another in the Senate. They want to approve the holiday and thus, three regular working days remain, one-third of them goes to other holidays, in addition to travelling for missions abroad. Fanek criticised. The national economy's annual losses are estimated at JD500 million if working hours are not compensated for, against a claimed JD16 million savings, according to the writer, who said he thought that the government was studying means to increase production by cancelling a number of holidays. Fanek said he was shocked by the decision.

Al Dustour's Mazen Saket commented on the Jordanian Chamber of Industry's participation in opening new markets for the local exports. Saket praised the chamber's efforts to strengthen and preserve economic relations between Jordan, the Palestinian National Authority and Iraq. However, the writer said, it is important that the chamber intensify its efforts to take effective measures to open the Arab and foreign markets to Jordanian goods. Perhaps the markets of Algeria, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Gulf states and Western European countries could be places where local production and industry can be successful, Saket suggested. In this regard, the government should be transparent and involve Jordanian industrial representatives in its delegations to the outside world, said Saket.

Private sector corruption deserves attention

Sunday's
Economic Pulse

By Dr. Fahed Fanek

WE ASSUME that fighting all kinds of corruption is or should be high on the agenda of Jordan's new era. Jordan deserves a clean atmosphere and a good reputation at all levels from top to bottom. Corruption in any country diminishes legitimacy, the very foundation of governance, and poisons the investment climate, which is the bedrock of the economy and growth.

Admittedly, Jordan does not have the image of a corrupt country, but no one denies the fact that corrupt practices exist. Corruption during the martial law era was mainly attributed to public sector officials, but now, in the time of relative democracy and openness, corruption has become more prominent in the private sector and the public shareholding companies.

Corruption in the public sector can be tackled by democracy, real opposition, freedom of press and

expression, accountability and a clean and just judicial system. A degree of transparency does exist in our country that has significantly hindered official corruption — such cases can be exposed through elected members of Parliament, free press and whispering and gossip which can be deafening at times.

The most serious problem at this time is corruption in the private sector, which, it seems, no one would like to tackle, or shed light on, due to the sensitivity of the subject and the high cost of indulging in this thorny area.

It is not true that exposing corruption in the press, referring corrupt managements to court, or putting the corrupt behind bars, tarnishes the image of the country. On the contrary, the opposite is true. Human beings are weak and susceptible to temptation. Societies do not differ in this aspect of human

nature, but they do differ widely in the machinery of control, accountability and punishment.

Private sector corruptions comes in many shapes and sizes, some of which do not formally break the law. In many cases, corrupt directors could not be prosecuted because they are legally covered by certain formalities. However, what counts is substance. Any benefit accruing to a director or manager other than a reasonable salary and a share of declared profits is corruption. This includes bad decisions to buy or sell on behalf of the company for personal benefit.

Corruption in the private sector deserves the intensive care once lent to corruption in the public sector. Public shareholding companies are the backbone of the national economy. If those companies are allowed to be transformed into family businesses managed by corrupt directors on behalf of absent,

silent or small shareholders, the end result will be loss of confidence in the investment atmosphere. Such losses will lead to economic stagnation, negative growth, and the spread of poverty and unemployment.

The decline of share prices in Amman Financial Market during the past five years is, in itself, a rough indication of real or perceived corruption in the management of shareholding companies. The lack of enthusiasm in underwriting offered shares of new companies to the public or to raise paid-up capital of existing companies, are other indicators of faltering confidence. The perception of corruption is as damaging as real corruption.

Corruption in the private sector should be fought vigorously and defeated in a visible fashion. It is a problem that deserves priority. It is a mission for today not tomorrow.

Nuclear Power:
The (Very) Long Good-bye

By Gwynne Dyer

THE NEW German government's decisions "have a half-life of only a few hours," raged Environment Minister Juergen Trittin in mid-February, as Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder backed away from a decision to close down all nuclear power stations in the country.

Schroeder replied robustly that what the quarrelsome Social Democrat-Green coalition needed was "less Trittin." It was just another chaotic day in the Punch-and-Judy show that passes for a government in Bonn. But it conveys a larger truth about the unloved nuclear power industry in Europe, and even elsewhere. Unloved it may be, but it is very hard to get rid of.

Europe, a rich and densely populated but resource-poor continent, accounts for just over half of the world's nuclear power stations: 221 out of 437. The major European countries' reliance on nuclear reactors for their electricity ranges from a high of 78 per cent in France to a still impressive 27.5 per cent for Britain.

As in North America, which accounts for most of the rest of the world's nuclear plants (123 installations), no new plants have been built in Europe for many years. The narrowly averted disaster at Three Mile Island in the United States in 1979, followed by the widespread fallout of lethal radiation in the near-meltdown at Chernobyl in Ukraine in 1986, put an end to all plans for expanding the industry. But it just won't go away, as the new German government rapidly found out after taking office last October.

The Greens made a phasing-out of Germany's 19 nuclear

power stations a pre-condition for entering a coalition with Schroeder's Social Democrats, and Schroeder loyally tried to keep the deal. But two days before legislation was due to go before the Bundestag on 27 January, he suddenly dropped it.

The immediate cause was the threat of multi-billion dollar lawsuits from Britain and France, which have long-term contracts to reprocess German nuclear waste (together with their unshakable promise to send dozens of trainloads of radioactive waste back to Germany if Schroeder didn't back off). But the longer-term problem was that nobody had figured out how to replace the 35 per cent of German power consumption that currently comes from nuclear plants.

There are certainly not 19 German cities that want a new coal-fired station built on their outskirts, nor do the Germans want to raise their dependence on natural gas that comes via Russian pipelines. In any case, the amount of money involved was far beyond the normal constraints of the budget. So Bonn is now talking about a 5-to-10-year phase-out on reprocessing contracts, and an equally long schedule for decommissioning the actual power plants — which means that no plant will be shut before the next election.

None may be shut down afterwards, either. As an example of the lasting clout of the European nuclear power industry, consider the story of the European Union and Chernobyl.

Ukraine, which suffered 32 immediate fatalities but tens of thousands of other deaths due to radiation-related cancers from the Chernobyl catastrophe, understandably wants to shut

'If public opinion stops the European Union's nuclear industries from building more plants at home, then they need contracts elsewhere. So the EU will soon be paying \$590 million to complete construction work on two nuclear power stations in Ukraine'

down the other two ageing reactors in the same complex as soon as possible.

President Leonid Kuchma's preference is to replace the power they provide with new generating plants that use natural gas.

The European Union, which is concerned that the winds could again blow fall-out from a nuclear accident in Eastern Europe onto its own territory, has committed large amounts of money for aid to clear up the problem of ageing Soviet-built nuclear reactors. But will it let Kuchma use the money to build new non-nuclear generating capacity? Of course not.

If public opinion stops the European Union's nuclear industries from building more plants at home, then they need contracts elsewhere. So the EU, which has already paid to refurbish Chernobyl-style reactors in Bulgaria and Lithuania and to reopen a Soviet pressurised-water reactor in earthquake-prone Armenia, will soon be paying \$590 million to complete construction work on two nuclear power stations in Ukraine, at Rovno and Khmelnytsky, that were left unfinished when the Soviet Union broke up in 1991.

The project, says Tobias Muenchmeyer of Greenpeace International, "is simply an excuse to get the taxpayer to underwrite a huge subsidy to the nuclear industry to keep it alive." The French, German, Belgian, British and Finnish nuclear industries have been putting pressure on their governments to agree to this scheme because they all get a slice of the action in Ukraine. Whether that's how Ukraine wants the money spent or not.

Meanwhile, the industry can take heart from the story of Sweden, where a referendum to shut down all the country's atomic plants passed in 1980. At that time it had six plants in operation, and six under construction. All twelve were running, and supplying almost half of Sweden's electricity, by the time the Swedish parliament actually voted in 1991 to shut two of them down by 1995.

Then a new government in 1991 scrapped that deadline. When yet another government came to power in 1997 and finally singled out one plant, Barseback-1, for shutdown by last July, its private-sector owners immediately appealed to the courts, claiming that the Social Democratic government was showing favouritism to the state-owned plants. It will be months before the court even decides.

If there were a 'Bill Clinton Memorial Prize for Political Survival' in 'Improbable Circumstances,' the nuclear power industry would be a natural winner. In the twenty years since Three Mile Island, few new plants have been built, but even fewer have been shut down. And there is always the hope of better times.

As the fear of greenhouse gasses from burning coal, gas, or oil to generate electricity begins to overtake the fear of long-lasting radioactivity from nuclear power generation, the long-term prospects of the industry are looking up. The largest stand and the biggest lobby at the global warming talks in Argentina in November belonged to the nuclear power industry.

Poor diplomacy and poorer taste

By Elias Zamaniri

ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER Benjamin Netanyahu and his foreign minister, Ariel Sharon, are due to arrive in Amman today, but their talks with top Jordanian officials might not be easy.

On the contrary, they might take place amid a strained atmosphere caused by Israeli indirect criticism of the late King Hussein of Jordan. Netanyahu on Thursday warned a gathering of university students in Tel Aviv against "threats that are posed to Israel from both Jordan and Iraq in the east." He spoke of a scenario whereby Iraq, under President Saddam Hussein, would decide to act against Israel with Jordan being the first Arab country to join it.

Speaking before students of Bar Ilan University, hotbed of right-wing extremism where Yigal Amir, the assassin of former prime minister Yitzhak Rabin received his education, Netanyahu asked rhetorically: "In 1991, who joined him first? It was King Hussein of Jordan — the knight of peace! Why did he do that? Because Iraq was strong. And Iraq of '91 was a little grain of sand in comparison to the Iraq equipped with nuclear weapons, and this puts a threat on our eastern border. We will find ourselves with an Iraqi threat on the Jordanian border and Iraqi continuity from the Tel Aviv suburbs to Baghdad."

Nothing can be said about Netanyahu's criticism of the late King Hussein except that it is discourteous, rude and undiplomatic.

The question of whether Netanyahu has a right to criticise any Arab leader is irrelevant here.

What is important in this context is that

Netanyahu dared to speak while Jordan is still mourning a very dear leader who built the modern Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. King Hussein who died of cancer earlier this month. He also voiced his criticism days only before his scheduled trip to Amman, a move that rarely occurs in the world of proper diplomacy.

Usually, world leaders tend to smooth and iron out most of their differences with countries they plan to visit and not vice versa. But Netanyahu in fact has opted for an offensive on Jordan even before he departs Tel Aviv.

Why did Netanyahu voice his criticism? Is it the process of warming up relations between Jordan and Syria, a manner that Israel has hoped would never occur?

Israel is very much annoyed at the rapprochement between Jordan and Syria. Israeli media spoke very negatively of President Hafez Assad visiting Jordan after King Hussein's death.

It even suggested that Syria has posed a major threat to Jordan and that Syrian troops might invade northern Jordan. When President Assad arrived in Amman to attend the funeral of King Hussein, Israel was taken not only by surprise but also with anger. Israelis certainly did not like to see President Assad's son, Bashar, flying into Amman to express condolences to King Abdullah since they saw this trip as yet further evidence that relations between the two countries were heading towards normalisation and not towards escalation as Tel Aviv had hoped.

When Jordan did not rule out altogether President Arafat's renewed confederation idea, Netanyahu's office did not hide its disappointment with the Jordanian reaction. A

statement released by the prime minister's office later said that Israel "should not forget that a confederation is established between two sovereign states but the proposal in itself seems to be more moderate than a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood."

Even before King Hussein passed away, Israel, both the official bodies and the press, spoke extensively of the alleged threats to Jordan because the majority of its citizens were of Palestinian origin.

They said that the Palestinians might try to destabilise the Kingdom. In short, during the past few weeks since King Hussein's return from the Mayo Clinic in the U.S. and his subsequent death, Israel behaved in a way that unveiled its real intentions towards Jordan. The Israelis hoped that with the dramatic and sorrowful developments in Jordan that culminated with the loss of King Hussein, the new heir would find himself in a weak position and that the Jewish state would emerge as the only friend Jordan has in the region.

Israel was wrong, and leaders not only from all the Arab countries but from the rest of the world arrived in Amman to pay tribute to one of the most influential leaders in the Middle East and the whole world in five decades. The international demonstration of solidarity with Jordan during its days of mourning has proved to Netanyahu that Jordan is not weak at all. Probably, this is one of the reasons why Netanyahu opted for a dialogue of a different kind, a dialogue of threats.

— The writer is a Jerusalem-based journalist

Letter to the Editor
Condolences

I WOULD like to express my condolences to the Jordanian people and to the Royal family, especially King Abdullah and Queen Noor, for the loss of a truly remarkable man. Since the death of King Hussein, letters have flooded into our national newspapers from fellow Sandhurst officers, radio enthusiasts and former pupils of Harrow — each one paying tribute to his courage, kindness and sense of humour.

The Daily Telegraph printed a full page obituary of the King's life which prompted me to learn more about him and Jordan. King Hussein showed a devotion to his people and his country that is not equalled in the world today. Being the same age as King Abdullah, I was not even born when his father was having to endure some of the worst crises of his political life, with unimaginable courage. My father was proud to have served in Amman as a young man in the RAF Regiment in 1956.

The legacy of King Hussein is that, today, Jordan has stability, prosperity and an openness that is the envy of the Arab World and of which the Jordanian people can be justly proud. I only wish that I had known him as his people have known him.

Helen Greenwood
Lancashire
United Kingdom

Syria
5,000

Attention
Sunday's
Economic Pulse

Son of the Internet

By Jeremy Warner

As the world's largest investor in cyberspace, reportedly owning 25 per cent of the Internet, Masayoshi Son will either go down in history as a blinding visionary or a reckless fool. While all around him whisper about bubbles bursting, the man from Japan is shouting 'buy, buy, buy! What does he know that we don't?'

ALAN GREENSPAN, chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve, thinks investing in them is like buying a lottery ticket, and that most will fail.

Bill Gates, of Microsoft, believes that these soar-away stocks should be trading on lower multiples than ordinary companies; he wouldn't advise even his worst enemy to invest at these levels.

Rupert Murdoch thinks the phenomenon will destroy more businesses than it creates. And The Economist believes they are about to come 'spectacularly crashing to Earth.'

Everyone, it seems, is convinced the U.S. craze for Internet companies is a financial bubble about to pop, and that when this happens, the consequences will be quite disastrous, not only for those who have invested in them at these apparently fanciful levels, but also for America's vibrant Silicon Valley and quite possibly for the world economy, as well. Everyone, that is, apart from those crazy Americans, who have taken to trading these stocks, generally on-line, as if this was a Saturday afternoon at the races; everyone, that is, apart from Masayoshi Son, or 'Mr. Internet' — the man who owns a quarter of cyberspace.

There is no doubting the bubble-like characteristics of the phenomenon. Individual Internet stocks have been known to change hands up to 10 times in a day, so frenzied is the level of trading, while it is not uncommon for the value of shares to go up by 50 per cent in a single trading session.

Some of the hottest Internet companies — Yahoo!, AOL and Amazon.com — have come to be valued, despite their insignificant profits, at more than Boeing and Disney.

So convinced is one leading U.S. economist of the bubble-like characteristics of the Internet craze that he has labelled it 'Tulip.com,' after the

great seventeenth century speculation in tulip bulbs. Rarely have investors seemed so determined to lose sight of reality.

So is the Internet shares phenomenon a dangerous game of financial roulette, which is bound to end in tears, or is there more to it than that?

One person who believes there might be is Mr. Son, a 41-year-old financier and entrepreneur who, with foresight the rest of us can only dream of, managed to take big shareholdings at an early stage in a whole raft of today's highest flying Internet companies. So inspired was his investment strategy, that he is now not only far and away the biggest investor worldwide in the Internet, but he can realistically claim to own 25 per cent of cyberspace. This may seem a meaningless boast, but shareholdings of around 30 per cent in Yahoo!, the most visited site on the Internet, Geo Cities, number three, and E-Trade, one of the U.S.'s highest Internet stock brokers, are just the more visible and valuable in a portfolio that includes nearly 100 'pure' Internet companies. No one else comes close to that concentration of power in what has become the world's fastest growing industry.

'I admit that what's now going on is crazy hype,' Mr. Son says. But he won't call it a bubble. 'Yes, of course there will be a correction, probably later this year or early next. The increase in valuations has obviously been far too fast. But we are long-term investors and this doesn't matter to us.'

Mr. Son's view of the Internet investment phenomenon is that we are only at the beginning. Today, the quoted Internet sector is worth about \$200 billion. 'My bet is that over the next 10 years, this sector will go to \$2,000 billion,' he says with a degree of confidence that only other self-made billionaires could match. 'I say it will rise ten-fold but that is only because I want to stick with a conservative forecast. Actually, I think twenty-fold is more realistic.'

To back this forecast, Mr. Son cites the example of the personal computer sector. Ten years ago, the collective market value of personal computer companies, including giants like Microsoft, Intel and Compaq, was \$38 billion. Today they are worth

more than \$2,000 billion. That's a degree of wealth transfer and creation unmatched in recent history. Is it really possible to repeat the trick with this second generation of technology and entrepreneurialism?

Of course it is, says Mr. Son. At the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, last month, Mr. Son asked a select audience of businessmen, bankers and economists which sector they thought would eventually be bigger, PCs or Internet? 'Ninety-five per cent voted Internet,' says Mr. Son. 'And they must be right. The PC market is limited to hardware, software and retail. The Internet is unlimited in size. From flowers to automobiles, the Internet will come to be key in virtually all industries.'

'There are only two numbers in my vocabulary — zero and infinity. The Internet encompasses both these characteristics. It has zero variable cost; there is a zero decrease in accuracy as information is passed around. At the same time, it has infinite reach, infinite information and infinite product range. Neither of these things — zero or infinity — were possible in the past.'

'Whoever understands these characteristics and incorporates them into their business model, will succeed in revolutionising their industries, and taking over from the old, established firms.'

Prophetic, starry-eyed stuff. Is he right?

The record, it might be said, speaks for itself. Mr. Son is today one of the Japan's leading entrepreneurs and very much the face of 'new' Japan — self-made and mistrustful of the past.

Amazingly for one listed as among 10 to watch out for in the latest assessment published by *Forbes* magazine of the 200 richest people in the world, he still answers his own e-mails — and he does it religiously everyday. If Japan has its own version of Bill Gates, Mr. Son is it.

His beginnings, however, could hardly have been less auspicious. He was born into a poor family of Korea descent who lived in a shanty town on the edge of Tokyo city in southern Japan, where they eked a living from breeding pigs and chickens. Perhaps because of this, Mr. Son shunned the

traditions of Japanese education and, at the age of 16, went to California to complete his schooling, eventually ending up at Berkeley. There his entrepreneurial skills received an early boost when he invented, and subsequently sold to Sharp for \$1 million, an early version of a multi-lingual pocket translator. His other business venture as a student was the import of used video games from Japan. He earned enough money to return to Japan and establish a business, Softbank — a distributor of PC software.

He was pushing at an open door. The PC market in Japan, unlike the U.S., was still in its infancy. Few others were doing it and Mr. Son rapidly moved to a position where he was supplying some 50 per cent of the total retail market in Japan. From there, he moved into PC magazines, developing along the way an almost absurdly simple and ambitious strategy — to control as much of the world's digital future as he could. If nothing else about Mr. Son is particularly Japanese, this kind of mission statement is — a straightforward, no-nonsense, statement of ambition and aim.

Inevitably it was to take Mr. Son back to the U.S. and that extraordinary hothouse of hi-tech entrepreneurial endeavour, Silicon Valley. By 1994, the Internet had already reached take-off point in the U.S. and it was spawning a new generation of companies, so different in their nature, ethos and decentralised management style from anything that had gone before, that many of them did not seem like conventional businesses.

For many of these Internet entrepreneurs, their companies were a personal crusade, a hobby and a lifestyle venture.

Softbank examined more than 5,000 of them, the idea being to take big strategic stakes in up to 100.

'The thing to think about,' Mr. Son says, 'is not that we risked our money in investing in 100 of these start-ups, but that we turned down 4,900 companies.'

What were his criteria? 'Yes, of course we looked at cash flow, but since many of these companies have no cash flow, this doesn't mean a lot. What we concentrated on was the business model — management and

the strategy for growth.'

Even then, these companies were not cheap. It is hard to tell exactly how much Softbank has invested in U.S. Internet stocks. Mr. Son says it was \$100 million. Other say it was much more.

What is not in dispute is that with the explosive growth in valuations, the combined worth of Softbank's Internet investments is now in excess of \$5 billion.

On top of that, there is an associated venture capital fund with a myriad of investments in smaller Internet enterprises. What singles Mr. Son out from other Silicon Valley venture capitalists is that he invests only in pure leading-edge Internet companies, shunning software, hardware and backbone infrastructure.

At the start, the strategy worked like a dream. With the help of a team of former Nomura financiers, hired especially for the purpose, Mr. Son would use the 'cheap' money available in Japan to finance his American adventures in technology. Against traditionally high Japanese valuations, his investments did not seem expensive.

It has not all been a bed of roses. Despite the runaway success of many of his gambles, there has been persistent scepticism. Like many entrepreneurial led companies, Softbank is widely regarded in the investment community as being overburdened with debt. Its financial affairs are less than transparent and its accounting practices are, by Western standards, of dubious quality.

As a consequence, Softbank's share price has been a mirror image of the volatility of the Internet shares it invests in, climbing to dramatic heights before plunging downwards and recovering again.

The Japanese stock market's scepticism is amply demonstrated by the fact that today Softbank is valued at less than the worth of its stake in Yahoo! alone. Mr. Son regards this as 'ridiculous', but it is testament to the degree of concern in the investment community that the last Financial Times cutting on Mr. Son described his company as 'the troubled Japanese multimedia conglomerate.'

That article appeared more than a year ago and Mr. Son would no doubt claim that the subsequent rise and rise of

traded Internet stocks has more than vindicated him. Nonetheless, the doubts remain. Even the biggest and best Internet companies still devour, rather than generate, capital, and Mr. Son's exposure is such that he has to try and feed that appetite. Is he not in danger of over-extending himself?

Perhaps, perhaps not. But on one thing Mr. Son is not alone in his thinking. Everyone agrees that the Internet is going to transform the way business is conducted and organised. It is, as yet, uncertain whether that revolution will be as awe inspiring and all-encompassing as, say, the development of the railway and the motor car, or the discovery of electricity.

On one level, e-commerce and the Internet are just alternative methods of distribution. Nothing very exciting about that, it might be said. On the other hand, the Internet allows for a degree of competition and price transparency never before seen. What's more, it brings this about on a global scale. If that might seem to be bad for the profitability of business and, by extension, for the value of companies, just dwell on this: One of Mr. Son's recent investments is Buy.com, a company which incorporates a zero or even negative margin into its business model. Who, in their right mind, would dream of starting a business which sells products for less than it bought them for? An Internet entrepreneur, of course. The idea is that the difference in price is recouped from advertising.

The Internet's share of total advertising worldwide is much less than 1 per cent. Mr. Son and others like him think this will rise exponentially with the growth of e-commerce. 'If you see an advertisement on your TV set and you are wearing your pyjamas at the time, what is the next action you can take?' he asks. On the Internet you can purchase that item immediately, rather than waiting till the next morning.

And still Mr. Son's Japanese investors, who allow Softbank's shares to trade at such a huge discount to its underlying assets, don't seem to get it. 'They will eventually,' Mr. Son predicts confidently.

The Independent

Syria's Millennium gift; 5,000 years of history

By Jack Redden
Reuters

SYRIA HAS thrown open the doors of its museums to send the world a millennium gift, an exhibition of priceless treasures that may never again be allowed out of the country.

Nearly 400 artifacts, covering a sweep of human history from the dawn of civilisation to the end of the Crusades, will go to Switzerland in November on an odyssey that will have crossed Canada and the United States by the time 'Syria: A Cradle of Civilisation' concludes in 2002.

'Syria is probably the finest example you can see of many cultures on the same land succeeding one after another,' said Francois Tremblay of Canada's Musee de la Civilisation de Quebec, which has been the driving force in working with Syria to organise the tour.

'You really have an overview of different cultures, from the very early stages of civilisation up to the present,' Tremblay told Reuters in the artifact-cluttered basement of Damascus Museum while photographing the final selection of treasures for the exhibition catalogue. 'Syria was an easy choice.' The collection is spectacular. Although chosen to illustrate themes in civilisation rather than purely for their artistic merit, individual pieces are likely to stagger Western audiences unprepared for Syria's cultural heritage.'

A figure with a gold lion's head and wings of solid lapis lazuli was excavated at Mari on the Euphrates River nearly 5,000 years after it had arrived as a gift from Ur in Mesopotamia. The refinement of Roman times is demonstrated by a silver helmet and a solid gold mask, both excavated near the city of Homs.

Such is the richness of the Syrian archaeological record that Canadians touring museums for items to include in the exhibition were astonished to see a curator casually open a drawer and ask if the gold mask lying loose in the bottom would be of interest.

Syria is at the centre of the Fertile Crescent, the arc of well-watered land reaching from Mesopotamia in present-day Iraq to Egypt where agriculture began 10,000 years ago.

That pivotal position, often falling under the sway of empires at either end of the Fertile Crescent, has left Syria with an unparalleled archaeological record.

Early city states like Mari rose and fell, the Assyrian, Egyptian and Hittite empires battled for control. Greek, Roman and Byzantine civilisations dotted the land with cities. The Arab invasion of the seventh century produced masterpieces of Islamic religious and military architecture.

Syria was the ideal focus for an exhibition centred on themes in human development: the organisation of society, economy and spiritual life. It

covers Syrian contributions — such as the first alphabet — until the Crusades, a suitable cod because that invasion re-acquainted Europe with its own cultural roots in the Middle East.

'At the dawn of the new millennium we are trying to reflect on the rules of civilisation and the best way is to look at the very early stage and ask ourselves 'what heritage will we leave to our descendants for the next Millennium?'' said Tremblay.

The exhibition will open in Basle, Switzerland and then move to Quebec to be open from May 30, 2000, to the following January 7. It then moves to Edmonton, Alberta and on to the United States in June 2001: San Jose until September, New York's American Museum of Natural History from October to January and closes in Denver on May 5, 2002.

There have been other Syrian exhibitions abroad, although not organised along such thematic lines. And none has included all the items seen this time — and none is likely to in the future.

'Many of the artifacts that have been loaned by Syrian authorities have never been out of Syria,' said Tremblay. 'And many of them will be on tour for the last time because they are now planning to renew many of their own galleries and these major artifacts will after this stay in Syria.' For Syria, the contract organised by the Quebec museum will mean a fee in materials for the Antiquities Department to improve its own facilities. More importantly for the country, it will provide a chance to show a heritage that is often obscured by current politics.

Despite its unequalled archaeology, Syria is better known in much of the West for U.S. charges that the government of President Hafez Al Assad has backed 'terrorism' — a reflection of its decades of conflict with Washington's chief ally Israel.

'We are very optimistic exhibition and we are confident it will contribute to better understanding between Canada and the United States and Syria,' said Sultan Muhesen, general director of the Syrian antiquities department.

Syria's lack of tourism has been partly self-inflicted — a government preoccupied with security did not value foreign tourists roaming the country. But a slowing economy and increasing awareness of the tourism potential may be encouraging a new desire to attract visitors.

'We are tracing the beginning of civilisation in all its aspects and we want to show that Syria played a crucial role in this,' said Muhesen. 'This exhibition will carry our message to other people at the beginning of the coming Millennium.'

In Ramallah, Palestinian Americans drive a 'boomlet'

West Bank Jazz — The Brooklyn of the Middle East

By Lee Hockstader
Washington Post Service

RAMALLAH, West Bank — It's a Thursday jazz night in the Palestinian city of Ramallah and Arnie Lawrence, Johnny Carson's old 'Tonight Show' saxophonist, is jamming.

On this particular night, at a neon-lit nightclub called Flamingo's, the boys happen to include Israelis on keyboard and guitar, a trio of young Arabs on oud and drums, and backup sax players from Australia and Ukraine. A mellow crowd nibbles fajitas and onion rings and knocks back beers at the bar, and the music winds playfully from Dizzy Gillespie and Duke Ellington to traditional Arab rhythms.

A decade ago, at the height of the Palestinian insurrection known as the intifada, a night out in Ramallah might have included a deadly cat-and-mouse game with Israeli troops or the cold-blooded execution of a suspected informer. Now, three years after Israeli troops withdrew from Ramallah, a new vibrancy and a semblance of normal life are settling over the West Bank town, albeit in fits and starts.

A 20-minute drive north of Jerusalem, the centre of Ramallah, famously sleepy before the intifada and notoriously violent during it, is a buzz with commerce and clogged with traffic, shops and new restaurants.

The town of about 35,000 could almost be called cosmopolitan. A women's newspaper, the only one for Palestinians, began publishing here. A Coca-Cola bottling plant has opened along with new car dealerships, hotels and banks. Land prices have tripled and quadrupled in the last few years, and the construction trade is brisk. The boomlet has a distinctly American flavor, drawing heavily on the money, ideas and experience of Palestinian Americans and others who have returned from the United States or have strong personal connections there.

For decades young men from Ramallah and its surrounding villages have set off to the United States to seek their schooling and fortune. Many stayed — more than 28,000 by some estimates — but some began to return after Israel and the Palestinians signed the Oslo peace accord in 1993.

Their influence is felt disproportionately to their numbers. In tiny West Bank villages east of Ramallah, it is not unusual to see Palestinian children tossing a football. In Ramallah, new businesses and construction sites are as often as not backed by Palestinian Americans.

Take the owner of Flamingo's, Garo Mardirossian. The 32-year-old Palestinian of Armenian descent attended college and met his wife, an American, in Michigan. He modeled his nightclub after the American chain restaurant Bennigan's.

On the street, Palestinian students still burn the occasional American flag when the United States bombs Iraq. But inside Flamingo's, the posters on the wall are a pantheon of American pop culture — James Dean, Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, Clint Eastwood and Charles Bronson.

Mr. Lawrence, the former 'Tonight Show' saxophonist, who teaches jazz in Israel and plays at Flamingo's every Thursday, is bullish on Ramallah. 'I grew up in Brownsville, Brooklyn, where it was a wonderful place to smell the aromas and taste the flavours of many cultures. Well,' he said, glancing around,

'this place is Brooklyn. People are happy.' But Israelis, for the most part, continue to give the town a wide berth, especially since an incident last December in which a 19-year-old Israeli soldier, Captain Asaf Myara, was dragged from a car on its outskirts and stomped by a Palestinian mob.

Nor do Palestinians see things as uniformly rosy. After a mini-explosion of new business and investment following the Oslo agreement, activity has tailed off and land prices have stabilized as prospects for long-term peace with Israel have blurred.

In most of the Palestinian-controlled parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the standard of living has declined in the five years since the Oslo peace agreement was signed. Incomes, buying power and private investment have dipped and poverty has climbed. Ramallah may look good in comparison to its neighbors, but it is not immune to the overall Palestinian economic malaise.

Little in the way of new industry has arrived to accompany the new construction, and investors remain wary. The West Bank still lacks an airport, as well as free passage through Israel to the other main Palestinian population centre, the Gaza Strip. And while some Palestinian Americans have settled in the city, a sizeable number came, looked around and booked a return flight to the United States.

'There's a few more shops and restaurants, but that doesn't have much effect on many average people,' said Nazih Shawar, 40, who returned to Ramallah in 1993 after spending 18 years in the United States. 'There's more business, yes, but there's no more stability and peace.' Still, the town has stirred to life in recent years, and one catalyst is the Palestinian American influence all around Ramallah — at Angelo's, a pizza parlor whose owners were inspired by the fast food they ate when they lived in Alabama in the 1980s; at the City Inn Hotel, built by Rida Kased, 60, a Palestinian American who quit the grocery business in Brooklyn and plowed \$1 million into the new project; and in the drowsy nearby village of Deir Dibwan, where the young men goofing off outside the pool hall are Californians and Ohioans visiting their relatives or looking for Palestinian wives.

'This place is just like America — baseball, basketball, skateboarding, you name it,' said Kanan Mustafa, 21, who runs a drive-through liquor store in Dayton, Ohio.

Ramallah also has benefited from its unique history and geography and from contemporary politics. Quakers came in the 19th century and opened schools; new money arrived from expatriates working in the United States beginning in the 1920s. Wealthy Arab princes, drawn by Ramallah's comparatively cool climate, built villas so they could spend their summers here. Predominantly Christian until early this century, Ramallah was open to outside influences and developed a certain permissiveness. Although Islam has gained ground today, Ramallah remains one of the few places on the West Bank where it is easy to get a beer.

Lately, the city has had a shot in the arm from the Palestinian National Authority, most of whose ministries have been established in Ramallah.

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

trialists see many negative effects from ending working hours, weekly holiday

According to Jamil Jubran, the society of investors at Industrial City (Sahab), weekly holiday will damage the Jordanian economy and the industrial industry. Rejecting indicated that the two-day holiday will lower production and remaining fixed, the profits will rise. Jubran at the worker's productivity as working hours increase as transportation costs and social obligations which companies try to minimise. He said to the government to sent situation as it is for of the industry and the economy.

akameh, general manager Arab Ceramics, said the company is passing through a which should prevent us sinking. "Imposing a two-day holiday would create economic recession in productive sector already suffers from bad economy as the last of economic sectors," requested the government consideration the interests of the sector and the production to work on solving problems which impede prosperity. He demanded government put suitable solution and to stop dumping order to enable the local carry out its role in the of the country.

Amin Khalili, plant manager of the Middle East Complex for Engineering, Electronics and Heavy Industries, said the two-day holiday will have negative effects of the social side as the worker would be cut off from his home for a long time as a result of lengthening working hours. He noted that female workers will be most affected by the decision. Khalili indicated that the two-day holiday will raise production costs as factories will lengthen working hours until 7 p.m. when the Jordan Electric Power Company considers the peak hours to be from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. "This will put additional costs on the local industry," he said.

Furthermore, Khalili described the holiday as a period for leisure but noted that the income per capita in Jordan does not allow the least of such an entertainment and, as such, the holiday should not be approved. He said that a holiday on Thursdays and Fridays would isolate Jordan from the rest of the world for 3-4 days, a period that will damage the interests of the national economy and local industry.

Sufian Al Ghusseini, plant manager of the Near East Petrochemicals Company, said the idea of a two-day holiday at present is not appropriate noting that the general economic situation is not suitable. In addition, he indicated, the income per capita does not provided for allocating a part of it for the hoped for leisure. "Should such a two-day holiday be imposed, it should be unified among all sectors," he concluded (Al Ra'i).

PROSCOPE

FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 1998
Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

On 21 to April 19: An older person will day with all sorts of ideas to fill up your escape before this person wakes up, you've getting out of town. If not, you'll be come job you promised years ago. Well, that amble. At last you could finally check it off

On 20 to May 20: Pay bills this morning and social obligations are all handled. Then you are people you love dearly and haven't long. If you don't already have something a few calls. It won't be hard at all to put a little trip.

On 21 to June 21: You're liable to spend you're also liable to find something you sim- without. This item could cost more than you and you might not have not the slightest Now that you've been warned, put in the

On 22 to July 21: Today a friend or partner ng to help with your work, and a job that nly this morning will turn looking like fun. e, you can go ahead and travel. Friends and iting to see you. If you could all go some- that would be even more perfect. Sailing.

On August 21: The work schedule is intense rovably asking yourself, "Why should I a Saturday?" Well, that's just how it goes. e, find something around the house that e. Next weekend will be much better for fun

On 22 to September 22: It's a marvellous ed! it's also a good day to renew your old or whatever sort of commitment you have. unmined right now, you could be easily iument may practically pop right into your ical moment, so don't fight fate.

On 23 to October 22: You'd rather be at about anywhere else this weekend. You're ving problems and working on projects. feeling that everything needs to be ripped That's not a bad idea. Once you're clear on ok like, go ahead and do it. You've got the

On 23 to November 21: You tend to be on innovations. You may be doing things them 10 years ago, that's OK sometimes. s it's better to keep up with the times. That you can find someone to help. A tutoring elop into romance.

On (November 22 to December 21) Act ing while you still have the advantage. 1 your time taken up by practical matters. made of money. You have no problem eath around. Unfortunately, you're going t. The holiday bills are starting to come in. (December 22 to January 20) You'll feel a as the moon goes into your sign. This is a to start new enterprises, whatever they are. moment longer. At least make the declara- re going to accomplish next in front of will work to catch this magnificent

On January 21 to February 19: Your inner you to make sure everything you do is even on the weekends. You've been resis- coaching in the past. This weekend, you make a major readjustment. Start by find- is successful in business and asking for

On February 20 to March 20: You and your buddies her and do something productive. Besides e, you can accomplish something. Is there den in your neighbourhood, or a vacant lot make one? You'd enjoy that, and so would nds. Check out the possibilities.

of February: Amethyst — Onyx

A.F.M. TRADE ACCESS 4646868 Saturday, 27-02-99

Company	Open	Close	Change
BANKS			
ARAB BK	218,000	221,000	+1.38%
NTL BK	1,510	1,500	-0.66%
BK OF JORDAN	1,340	1,340	0.00%
THE HOUSING BK	2,280	2,280	0.00%
JO. KUWAIT BK	1,640	1,660	+1.22%
JO. GULF BK	0,670	0,660	-1.49%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1,580	1,680	+0.59%
ARAB INVS. & FIN. BK	1,340	1,330	-0.75%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0,520	0,530	+1.92%
BANKS INDEX	288.610		point = +1.05%
SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1,730	1,720	-0.58%
IRIBID ELECTRICITY	1,750	1,700	-2.86%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0,880	0,880	0.00%
AL-ZARQA FOR EDU	0,900	0,910	+1.11%
ARAB INTL. FOR INVS. &	1,880	1,970	+0.51%
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1,170	1,180	+0.85%
SERVICES INDEX	114.610		point = -0.16%
INDUSTRY			
AT-TANKEEP	1,100	1,050	-4.55%
CEMENT	3,760	3,700	-1.60%
PHOSPHATE	2,370	2,370	0.00%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10,770	10,780	+0.09%
JO. TANNING	5,150	5,410	+5.05%
THE IND. COMM. & AGRIC	1,100	1,100	0.00%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	3,100	3,100	0.00%
CERAMIC IND	1,300	1,250	-0.77%
JO. DAIRY	2,950	2,950	0.00%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1,570	1,550	-1.27%
ARAB CHEMICAL DETER	7,800	7,350	-5.00%
DAK AL DAWA	5,800	6,050	+5.00%
JO. STEEL	0,970	0,970	0.00%
CHLORINE	1,200	1,190	-0.83%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0,410	0,420	+2.44%
PETRO - CHEMICAL	0,310	0,300	-3.23%
CHEMICAL & VEGETABLE	1,140	1,160	+1.75%
NTL CABLE	0,560	0,540	-3.57%
SULPHO - CHEMICALS	0,420	0,400	-4.76%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHAR	1,320	1,300	-1.52%
KAWTHER	0,370	0,370	0.00%
EL-ZAY	1,290	1,270	-1.55%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0,600	0,600	0.00%
NTL ALUMINIUM	0,830	0,800	-3.61%
INDUSTRY INDEX	96,040		point = -0.28%
PARALLEL			
EXPORT BK 75Z	0,930	0,930	0.00%
JO. TRADING FACILITIES	0,420	0,440	+4.76%
UNION INVS. CORP	0,890	0,880	-1.12%
AL - EKBAL	0,900	0,900	0.00%
ADVANCED PHAR	0,530	0,530	0.00%
AL - SHARO	1,050	1,100	+4.76%
MEDICAL APPLIANCES	0,450	0,440	-2.22%
AL DAWLAH	0,620	0,630	+1.61%
ARAB INVESTORS	1,060	1,050	-0.94%
ARAB INTL. TRADE	0,190	0,200	+5.26%
SPECIALIZED INVS	0,650	0,650	0.00%
OPTICAL & AUDIAL	0,420	0,410	-2.38%
READY MIX CONCRETE	0,820	0,820	0.00%
CENTURY	1,180	1,180	0.00%
NAMICO	0,190	0,190	0.00%
MIDDLE EAST PHAR 90Z	0,580	0,570	-1.72%
UNION TOBACCO	4,100	4,050	-1.22%
AL-RAZI	0,540	0,540	0.00%
UNITED ENG. IND	0,200	0,190	-5.00%
INTL CERAMIC	0,360	0,360	0.00%
GRAND INDEX	183.23		point = +0.62%

Clinton calls for a more humane world trading system

SAN FRANCISCO (AFP) — President Bill Clinton Friday prodded Europe and Japan to boost growth and follow the U.S. lead in making their markets more accessible to foreign goods.

In a major foreign policy address here, the president also urged the free flow of capital across international borders, and called for a world trading system that protects workers' rights.

U.S. officials in recent days have stepped up the pressure on Europe and Japan to shoulder more responsibility in offsetting economic meltdown elsewhere, notably by absorbing more imports from economies in crisis.

Clinton returned to the theme Friday, while at the same time calling for reforms to the international financial system.

"The leading economies have got a lot of work to do," he told his audience of political and business leaders. "We have to do everything we can, not just the United States, but Europe and Japan, to spur economic growth."

"Unless there is a restoration of growth, all the changes in the financial rules we make will not get Asia, Latin America and the countries of Russia out of their difficulties," he emphasised.

Alluding to protesters he encountered here who

denounced globalisation as benefiting rich investors at the expense of workers, Clinton argued that hundreds of millions of people had seen their standards of living rise because they had found a way to "produce goods and services that could be purchased beyond the borders of their nation."

But he maintained that trade was not an end in itself. "It has to work for ordinary people. It has to contribute to the wealth and fairness of societies."

He called for a more humane world trading system, one "that upholds the rights of workers and consumers and helps us and them in other countries to protect the environment so that competition among nations is a race to the top, not the bottom."

Critics of global free trade charge that it allows businesses in the industrialised world to transfer production to developing countries where they can exploit poorly paid workers and take advantage of lax environmental regulations.

As for the free flow of capital, Clinton acknowledged there were risks involved.

Several prominent academic commentators have attributed the 1997 Asian financial crisis to dramatic, disruptive capital movements by investors looking for easy profit.

"We have got to find a way to facilitate the movement of

money, without which trade and investment cannot occur, in a way that avoids these dramatic cycles of boom and then bust, which have led to the collapse of economic activity in so many countries around the world," Clinton said.

He cited a need for reforms to the international financial system that would also encourage countries to establish "open, properly regulated" financial institutions to guard against imprudent lending and borrowing.

Clinton maintained that the United States had made significant contributions to limiting the global crisis by "helping to get money to Brazil, to Russia, to other countries and by keeping our own markets open."

He then hurled a challenge at Europe and Japan saying:

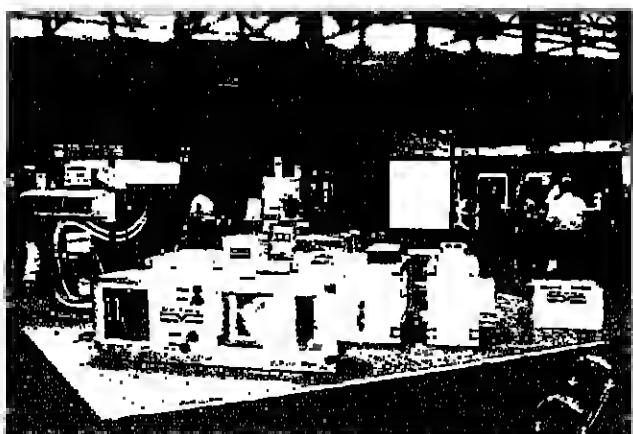
"If you compare ... our import patterns with those of Europe or those of Japan, you will see that we have far, far more open markets. It has worked to make us competitive and productive."

But at the same time he vowed to protect U.S. industries, such as steel, from unfair foreign competition that violates U.S. trade legislation.

"While I will do everything to keep our markets open, I intend ... to do everything I can to enforce our trade laws," he stressed.

Petra launches marketing campaign in U.S.

AMMAN (J.T.) — Petra Engineering Industries put on show its products at the most prestigious annual exhibition, the American Heating and Refrigeration Exposition (AHR '99) in the U.S. late January. The show was considered by far the largest and most important event for all air-conditioning companies, hosting over 1,300 exhibitors from over 30 countries, with an attendance of more than 50,000 visitors from the manufacturing, contracting and consulting sectors of the industry worldwide.



Petra products on exhibition in the United States

with a wide display of high quality products ranging from its standard large capacity air-cooled chillers, to its highly-engineered specific purpose non-thermal-bridge air handling units.

Petra displayed and operated its newest system — the VVW (variable water volume). This system shown with Petra's compact residential air-cooled water chiller and decorative high-wall fan coil unit grabbed the attention of all

the visitors. The VVW system, with its decorative and compact indoor unit uniquely satisfies the cooling and heating requirements of both the homeowner as well as the larger spectrum of customers. The system is an attractive alternative to conventional systems due to its low installation and running cost. The VVW system is extremely versatile, easily fitting into private residences as well as office buildings and hotels.

Gaz de France profit soars 66.6 per cent

PARIS (AFP) — State-owned gas utility Gaz de France said this week its net profit rose by 66.6 per cent in 1998 to 2.5 billion francs (381 million euros, \$434 million) from 1.5 billion francs in 1997.

Sales edged up 6.3 per cent to 58.7 billion francs (8.95 billion euros) from 55.2 billion francs (8.49 bil-

lion euros). Meanwhile, in Brussels, the Eurogas Organisation reported that consumption of natural gas in west Europe grew by 4.1 per cent in 1998 from the figure for 1997 to a record amount of 368 billion cubic metres or 309 million tonnes of oil equivalent. The previous record of 356 billion cubic metres in 1996

had been beaten even though the weather had been mild.

The increase reflected a consistent increase of the number of consumers, by 12 per cent in five years to 78 million, and notably by industrial companies.

In the last five years consumption in west Europe had increased by 26 per cent.

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Rodman makes Lakers debut

INGLEWOOD, California (R) — Dennis Rodman began life as a Laker on Friday, sparking his new team to a 99-83 victory over the winless Los Angeles Clippers and making Kurt Rambis a winner in his head coaching debut.

In his first game since helping the Chicago Bulls defeat the Utah Jazz for the NBA championship on June 14, the flamboyant Rodman grabbed 11 rebounds and handed out six assists over 26 minutes, paying immediate dividends.

Rodman entered the game with 6:02 left in the first quarter and the Lakers proceeded to score 15 of the next 20 points to take a 28-16 lead.

"I really haven't stepped on the court or touched a basketball in nine months, that's pretty good," said the NBA rebounding king, whose ever-changing hair was Lakers purple for the occasion.

"I felt a little shy at the beginning because I didn't want to mess up, but when I stepped on the court it all just came back to me," he said.

"Give me about 10 games into my season and you're going to see the Dennis of old," he said. "In the second half, I felt real good." Kobe Bryant led the Lakers with 22 points and Shaquille O'Neal added 19 in 27 minutes.

"He gets his hand on every loose ball," O'Neal said of Rodman. "That's what I've been waiting for, the type of player like that." Rambis, a member of four Lakers championship teams, was named head coach before the game. He replaced Del Harris, who was sacked on Wednesday.

In Orlando, Anfernee Hardaway scored the first six points of overtime to propel the magic to a 103-100 victory over the Indiana Pacers in a battle of division leaders.

Hardaway's overtime heroics atoned for a missed free throw that could have ended the game in regulation.

With 14 seconds left in the fourth quarter and a chance to ice the game, Hardaway missed his second attempt, leaving the Magic with a 95-92 lead. Indiana's Mark Jackson then drained a 3-point shot with 3.3 seconds remaining to send the game into OT.

Hardaway led all scorers with 23 points and recorded a career-high 13 rebounds and five assists. Nick Anderson added 21 points for the Magic.

Jalen Rose led Indiana with 20 points.

In Toronto, rookie Vince Carter scored 21 points to lead the Raptors to a wire-to-wire 102-92 victory over the Minnesota Timberwolves.

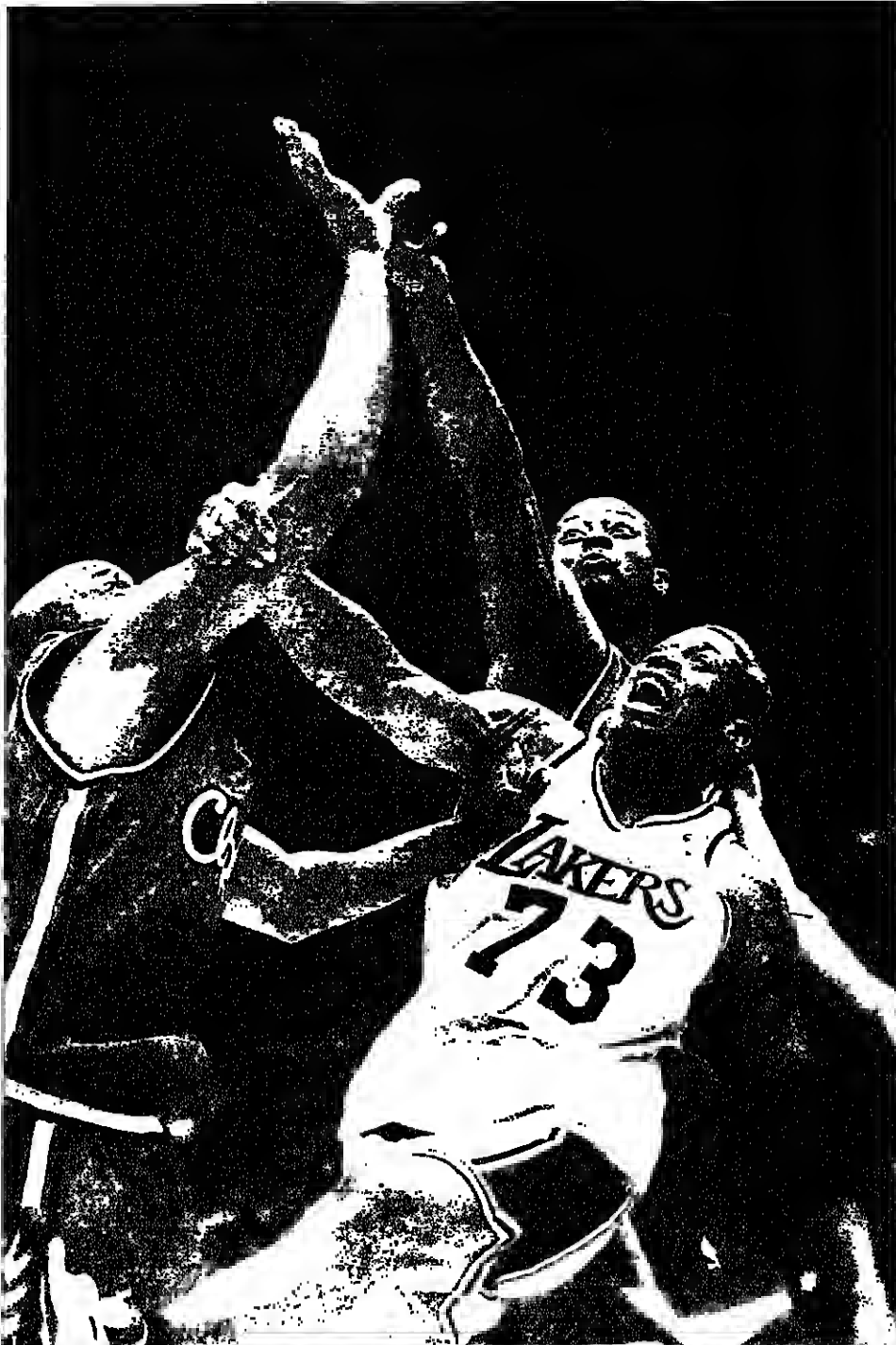
Charles Oakley added 18 on 8-of-10 shooting and Kevin Willis had 13 points and 16 rebounds for Toronto, which led by 20 points after the first quarter.

In Charlotte, Derrick Coleman scored 28 points as the Hornets nearly blew an 18-point fourth-quarter lead but held on for a 97-95 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers.

J.R. Reid scored 14 of his 22 points in the opening period and Bobby Phillips added 21 for the Hornets, who led 32-13 after one quarter but were outscored 27-11 in the fourth.

Isaiah Rider scored 27 for Portland, which used a 15-4 run early in the fourth quarter to make it close.

In Boston, Paul Pierce and Antoine Walker scored 24



Dennis Rodman falls after clashing with Clipper players during a match against the Clippers at the Great Western Forum in Los Angeles, CA. The Lakers won 99 to 83 (AFP photo)



Seattle Supersonics Gary Payton (R) goes up against San Antonio Spur Sean Elliott (L) during first quarter action of their game in Seattle, Washington (AFP photo)

points apiece and the Celtics forced 26 turnovers to beat a fatigued New York Knicks 94-80.

The Knicks, coming off an exciting overtime win over Minnesota Thursday night, were held to just nine points in the fourth quarter.

After the Knicks scored the first six points of the second half to tie the game at 56-56, Walker scored the next eight points in a 10-0 run as Boston took control.

At Detroit, Bison Dele converted a dunk off a pick-and-roll pass from Grant Hill with 2.7 seconds left as the Pistons snapped the Miami Heat's seven-game winning streak with a 95-93 victory.

Miami had a chance to win, but Terry Porter's 3-pointer banked off the rim as time expired.

Hill led a balanced attack with 22 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists. Joe Dumars added 21 points and Jerry Stackhouse contributed 19 off the bench for Detroit.

Alonzo Mourning led Miami with 29 points and nine boards.

In Denver, Danny Fortson's follow with five seconds left lifted the Nuggets to a 96-95 win over the Milwaukee Bucks.

A short jumper by Glenn Robinson with 15 seconds left gave the Bucks a 96-95 advantage.

Denver point guard Chauncey Billups drove to the basket but could not convert. Fortson grabbed the rebound and put back the game-winning shot as the Nuggets rallied from a 81-69 deficit after three quarters.

At Utah, the Jazz tied a franchise record for fewest points allowed in a 80-65 victory over the Dallas Mavericks.

The Mavericks shot a woeful 29 per cent from the field (20-of-68) as the Jazz improved to a league-best 10-2.

Bryon Russell led the Jazz with 17 points and Karl Malone had 13 points and 10 rebounds in just 27 minutes as Utah shot just 37 per cent (26-of-70), but led by as many as 22 points in the first half.

In Seattle, Gary Payton scored 14 of his 23 points in the key third quarter as the Supersonics beat the San Antonio Spurs 92-82.

Seattle had lost four of its previous five games but took control with a 30-18 third quarter. Payton scored the final five points of a 14-2 spurt and nine points in a 12-2 run.

Tim Duncan led San Antonio with 22 points. At Golden State, Terry Cummings sank the go-ahead free throws with 77 seconds remaining and the Warriors used tough defence down the stretch to hold on for a 94-90 victory over the Phoenix Suns.

The Suns had two chances down the stretch to draw even but Rex Chapman missed a jumper and George McCloud misfired on a 3-point shot in the final 20 seconds.

Lakers name Rambis coach

INGLEWOOD (R) — The Los Angeles Lakers on Friday named Kurt Rambis their coach for the rest of the season, replacing Del Harris who was fired on Wednesday.

When Harris was sacked, team president Jerry West said either Larry Drew or Rambis, both assistants under Harris, would get the nod. They elected to go with the man who was a member of four Lakers championships teams in the Magic Johnson era to coach Dennis Rodman.

"It was a tough decision and we went back and forth the last two days," general manager Mitch Kupchak said at a news conference.

"We feel either coach would have done an excellent job, but myself, our staff, Jerry West, (owner) Jerry Buss were in 100 per cent agreement on Kurt Rambis," Kupchak said.

Rambis, who celebrated his 41st birthday Thursday, was in his fourth year as an assistant under Harris.

In his head coaching debut Rambis was a winner against the woeful Los Angeles Clippers, a team whose head coaching position he turned down last summer.

"I was holding out to coach a team that would give me the best chance to win a championship," Rambis said. "The Lakers have that chance."

"My job is to get these guys to play harder and more together on both ends of the floor," Rambis was known for his blue collar work ethic and hard-nosed play throughout his NBA career, doing much of the dirty work during the Lakers' flashy "showtime" years.

Harris was dumped after the underachieving Lakers fell to 6-6 with three consecutive losses, including embarrassing defeats by the lowly Denver Nuggets and Vancouver Grizzlies.

Rambis inherits a team that just added colourful, controversial rebounding King Rodman, who made his Lakers debut Friday night sporting purple hair.

Samaranch blames bidding cities for corruption scandal

BARCELONA (AFP) — International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Juan Antonio Samaranch claimed Friday that cities bidding to stage the Olympic games must take 50 per cent of the blame for the corruption scandal engulfing the Olympic movement.

Samaranch said "I don't want to make excuses for anyone but I can accept that 50 per cent of the blame lies with IOC members and 50 per cent with certain candidate cities."

He explained that certain IOC members that several bidding cities had adopted "very aggressive policies" but also conceded that some IOC members "were not honest."

Five members of the IOC are due to be expelled at a meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland, next month.

Four IOC members have already quit, three are under investigation and one has been severely reprimanded. Samaranch said this meeting would be a "therapy to help refloat the IOC ship."

Giresse spell still working for Toulouse

PARIS (AFP) — Toulouse continued their recent revival under new-old coach Alain Giresse by gaining a 1-1 draw at Bastia on Friday night while champions Lens hoisted their slender chances of Europe with a 2-1 win at Auxerre.

Giresse has yet to taste defeat since starting his second spell at Toulouse, who were odds on for relegation when he arrived exactly a month ago.

A week ago the strugglers upset title hopefuls Marseille and Andre Cruz Oceano bagged a point after Librarian striker Daye Prince had opened the scoring on the hour.

Giresse took Toulouse to promotion two seasons ago before answering the call to coach Paris Saint Germain last summer. But he lasted only three months before being sacked with PSG having made a dreadful start.

The Parisians have seen things go from bad to worse despite the appointment of former coach Artur Jorge, who won them the 1994 title.

Ironically, the current trend is for footballers and coaches to blossom only by leaving PSG.

Giresse's good run at Toulouse is one example, but another is hadboy former French international striker Patrice Loko, who handed Lorient a vital 1-0 win at Le Havre on Friday.

Loko, a 1995 title winner with Nantes, signed on loan for Lorient in November after a torrid spell at PSG during which he was convicted of indecent exposure and underwent months of psychiatric treatment.

But he has blossomed once again in Brittany, scoring six goals, although Lorient are still hot favourites to return to The Second Division after just one season in the top flight.

Patrick Nouma and Philippe Brunel were on target for Lens at Auxerre, for whom Tomasz Klos replied.

Elsewhere Friday, Rennes saw off Nancy 2-1 to keep in the hunt for a Champions League preliminary round slot. They leapfrogged Nantes into fifth place.

Nancy have slipped into the bottom three and Tony Cascarino's tenth goal of the season was scant consolation. Metz, meanwhile, drew 1-1 at home to tailenders Sochaux.

All the top of the table action came Thursday, when a Robert Pires snapshot sent Marseille a point clear after a 1-0 win over Strasbourg while rivals Bordeaux were held 0-0 at Nantes.

Marseille, who face Celta Vigo in the UEFA Cup quarter-finals next week, made heavy weather of a Strasbourg side reduced to ten men following a red card for Habib Beye on the half hour.

Marseille now have 54 points from 25 games, a point more than their rivals.

PSG meanwhile, lost 1-0 at home to Lyon, who are still gunning for honours both on the domestic front and in the UEFA Cup.

Alain Caviglia blasted the only goal from the penalty spot.

Monaco stayed ahead of Nantes in fourth spot following an entertaining 3-2 win at Montpellier.

McRae extends lead as Auriol and Sainz slip back

NAIROBI (AFP) — Britain's Colin McRae extended his Ford focus' lead in the Safari Rally to five minutes on Saturday as his Toyota rivals Didier Auriol of France and Carlos Sainz of Spain both slipped back during the eighth stage over the rocky head of the great rift valley.

Defending champion Richard Burns of Britain retired from the event during the seventh stage in the day.

Organisers said Burns retired with a smashed steering column at Nyaru control, 246km northwest of Nairobi, during the second stage of the day.

Burns' retirement was the final blow for Suharu, who lost their other two cars of Juba Kankkunen and Bruno Thiry with electric failures on the first leg.

As the survivors raced back on stage eight, only four hours away from the end of the third day, Auriol opted for a cau-

tious strategy on the rough first half of the stage, dropping two minutes.

Sainz hit a seemingly innocuous hump, but his wheel rim spokes collapsed, not only forcing a change of wheel, but also damaging his shock absorbers.

McRae, however, said the eighth stage was not nearly as severe as he had expected, and the specially hard-compound tyres were almost unmarked after the 80km.

Tommi Makinen of Finland, who moved up to third in his Mitsubishi Lancer after Sainz's problems, was fastest on the stage and gained on Auriol but with a 15-minute deficit, he must depend on McRae and Auriol having major problems if he is to get back into contention.

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McRae extends lead as Auriol and Sainz slip back

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Sports

LOCAL SPORTS SCENE



Fawwaz to lecture on Olympic leadership

AMMAN — Vice-President of the Jordan Olympic Committee (JOC) Mouaffaq Al Fawwaz will leave for London Monday to participate in a four-day training course to prepare officials for leadership positions in Olympic. Fawwaz is the only Arab-Asian who will take part in the course, which is sponsored by the International Olympic Committee, and he would be chosen as international Olympic lecturer.

Orthodox to host Al Ittihad

AMMAN — The Orthodox Club is seeking to host Syria's Al Ittihad basketball team for friendly matches as part of preparations for the West Asian Qualifiers, which will be held in April. Meanwhile, President of the club's Sports Committee Fadi Zreikat is expected to leave for Lebanon within the next few days for talks with officials from Al Hikmah Club which will take part in the qualifiers that will include the champion teams of Syria, Iran, Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen and Jordan.

Cypriots to box in Amman

AMMAN — The Jordan Boxing Federation is currently finalising technical and administrative preparations to host the Cypriot team for a training camp and a friendly March 2-6. The event, which will include six weight categories, will take place at Al Hussein Sport City with Ayman Nadi in the 75kg category and player Khalidoun Abdul Hamid 57-kg leading Jordan's team. Mohammad Abu Khadijeh was named on the team but will probably miss the matches.

Compiled by Ahmad Khatib

Seoul 400m Olympic champion impressive in comeback bid

ATLANTA (AFP) — Steve Lewis, who went from Olympic gold in 1998 to fearing he might never walk again, made an impressive return here Friday at the United States Indoor Athletics Championships. The Seoul Olympics 400-metre champion and Barcelona silver medalist won his 400m qualifying heat in 46.38 seconds, giving the medical miracle who refused to retire a chance to reach next week's world championships. "I'm not finished making history yet," Lewis said. "I don't feel in any way I reached my potential. There's a lot more in me. I just feel I still have it. When you're a runner, it's hard to walk away from it." Lewis, who turns 30 in May, began feeling weak in 1993. Doctors were stumped until 1996 when they found a fist-sized cyst on his lower back that was twisting the nerves leading to his legs. "I was weak all the time. I couldn't train," Lewis said. "I thought I was just sick. Had the cyst been discovered later, I would not have been able to walk." Properly frightened by the medical report, Lewis had the cyst removed in April of 1996, took a year off to recover and began serious training little more than a year ago. "Before the surgery, I didn't think I would ever run again," Lewis said. "I had problems jogging a mile. My legs were that infected. So running out here means a lot."



Asked if it seemed like 11 years had passed since his Seoul triumph, Lewis replied, "yeah it does. Long road. I was younger. It came a lot quicker and easier. Now I'm going through what everybody else does to get to that point." Lewis, who ran on gold-medal Olympic 4x400m relays in 1988 and 1992, looks forward to facing Michael Johnson on the way to his long-term goal of the Sydney Olympics, at which he would be 31. Age does not worry him. "The majority of guys in my event are my age or older. I don't feel I'm too old to accomplish great things in my event," Lewis said. "I'm mentally tougher, more aggressive all the time. My goal now is to find that old Steve Lewis. That will save the day. He is still there." But here in Saturday's finals, the star attractions will be Gail Devers, the two-time reigning 100m Olympic champion, and Maurice Greene, the world 100m outdoor champion and 60m indoor world record holder. Devers confirmed Friday she will try to win her third indoor 60m title and qualify for the chance to defend her world indoor sprint title.

Defending World Champion Jearl Miles-Clark crosses the finish line in her preliminary race of the Women's 400M at the U.S. Indoor Track & Field Championship at the Georgia Dome in Atlanta, GA. Miles-Clark qualified for the final in a time of 53.12 (AFP photo)

in Japan. Devers, who missed the 1998 outdoor season with a strained Achilles tendon, ran a 1999 60m world-best 6.98 seconds to win last Sunday in France and won again Thursday in 7.03 at Stockholm. Greene has dominated world sprinters the past two years and has his eyes on Sydney Olympic gold after being ousted in the 1996 U.S. Olympic trials quarter-finals. But first comes a run at his world indoor record of 6.39 seconds, set last year in Madrid. "The track is so fast, I'm liable to go low 6.30," he said. "If it comes out, it's going to be a beautiful thing. Then again, I'm not caring about the world record."

The Embassy of Japan announces THE 1999 STUDY TOUR AWARDS FOR OUTSTANDING STUDENTS OF THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE

The Japan Foundation, a national cultural institution of Japan, is currently inviting students and learners of the Japanese language in Jordan for a possible two-week study tour of Japan. In order to select a nominee, the Embassy of Japan will hold an examination in Amman on Thursday, 11 March 1999 at 10:00 a.m. Applications must be submitted by 9 March 1999. Those who wish to apply for the programme, or have interest in it, are kindly requested to contact the following for further details.

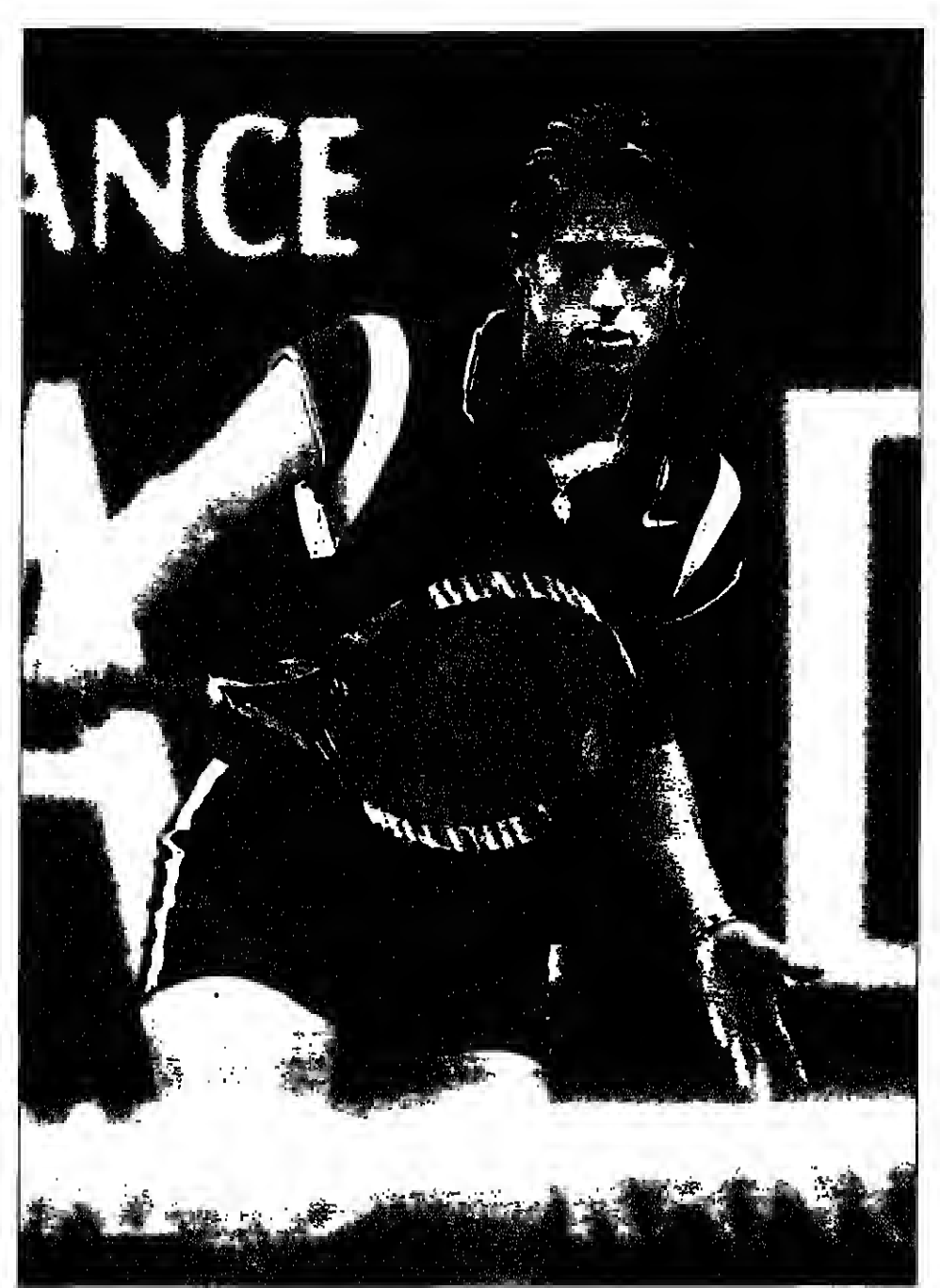
EMBASSY OF JAPAN
CULTURAL AFFAIRS SECTION
P.O. Box 2835 Amman 11181
TEL 593-0486, 593-1487

Johansson torpedoes Kafelnikov's No. 1 bid

LONDON (AFP) — Yevgeny Kafelnikov's dream of becoming the first Russian World No. 1 was dashed for the time being Friday when he bowed out of the guardian direct cup, losing his quarterfinal with Sweden's Thomas Johansson in straight sets. Kafelnikov, the Australian Open champion, knew a win would take him above American Pete Sampras at the head of the world rankings to make him only the 15th number one, since rankings began in 1973. But that knowledge appeared to weigh heavily on his mind as he found himself playing second fiddle to eighth seed and World No. 19 Johansson, who advanced 6-2, 7-6 (7/5). Kafelnikov served two consecutive double faults in the opening game to hand his opponent a break point and then hit a simple forehand out to give Johansson the early initiative. The Swede then crucially saved two break points to move 3-1 ahead, firing three straight aces from break point down, one clocking 216 kph. Kafelnikov then saw his serve go to pieces as Johansson snatched another break of serve and raced to the first set in just 27 minutes. The Russian regained his composure in the second set and looked more like the player who had won two tournaments already this year. But he struggled to pressure Johansson's serve and whenever he needed to, the Swede pulled out another big serve to blast himself out of trouble. With no breaks in the set, Johansson stormed into a 4-1 lead in the tie-break after another clutch of inexplicable Kafelnikov errors. Kafelnikov battled back from 2-6 down to reduce the deficit to 5-6, but on the next point a sublime drop volley from Johansson clinched the victory and ensured Sampras can rest easy — for now.

Mauresmo beats Hingis, Van Roost to reach Paris final

PARIS (AFP) — Sixth-seeded Amelie Mauresmo swept aside last year's runner-up Dominique Van Roost of Belgium 6-0, 7-6 (7/5) on Saturday to reach the final of the \$520,000 Paris Indoor Open — but she needed to turn off the panic buttons after her opponent staged a desperate second-set revival. The 19-year-old French player, who avenged her defeat in the final of the Australian Open 24 hours earlier by defeating Switzerland's World No. 1 Martina Hingis, now plays either compatriot Nathalie Dechy or Serena Williams of the United States for the title on Sunday. Van Roost, the third seed, clearly having problems coping and concentrating with the non-stop chanting, dancing and cheering of the elated Mauresmo fans inside the packed Coubertin stadium, had to wait until the ninth game to get on the scoreboard. And when the moment came, she was so relieved she threw her fists in the air and looked like a player who had just won Roland Garros. After a 26-minute first set of one-way traffic, the 25-year-old Belgian, who has been enjoying an excellent start to 1999 after reaching the final in Auckland and the quarter-finals at the Australian Open, at last began to find her rhythm. And she sent the alarm bells ringing among the



Amelie Mauresmo of France hits a backhand to World No. 1 Martina Hingis of Switzerland in Paris, during their quarterfinal match of the 'Gaz de France Open' indoor tennis tournament. Mauresmo beat Hingis 2-6, 6-1, 6-3 (AFP photo)

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The United States Information Service (USIS) located at the U.S. Embassy in Amman is looking for an Executive Secretary for the Cultural Affairs and Information Officers. Specialized training in typing and computer Word processing (Microsoft Word) is required. A university degree is desirable. Candidate should have three years of progressively responsible office/secretarial experience, excellent English-Arabic bilingual language skills and be a team player. Only qualified applicants who meet the above desired requirements should submit an application (available at the Embassy gate) to the Personnel Officer prior to March 14, 1999.

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Invitation to Tender
The Palestine Monetary Authority (PMA) would like to invite bids for equipping its automated clearing rooms in Ramallah and Gaza, within specifications found in both offices. Qualified companies can obtain the tender documents from both offices against a non-refundable payment of five hundred U.S. dollars (\$500) either in cash or in transfer to Arab Bank/Ramallah Al Balad A/C #651660-510 within two weeks from the date of announcement to:
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Fax # 02-2959922 Ramallah
Or Gaza Fax # 07-2824599
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E-mail: Pmagaza@palnet.Com
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Deadline for receiving bids with payment receipt will be on Saturday, April 17-99 at 12:00 noon.
Note: Pls. keep the payment receipt attached to the tender application form. Palestine Monetary Authority

Ocalan aide claims Greece took part in arrest

Three slain Kurds buried as 17 rebels killed in southeast Turkey

'Ocalan says ex-wife ordered killing of Palme'

Agencies

A KEY aide of Abdullah Ocalan accused Greece on Saturday of helping an "international conspiracy" to capture the Kurdish rebel leader.

"We will not forget that our leader was surrendered with the help of Greek officials," said Sema Kilic, who was granted political asylum in Greece.

The allegations could turn into a political nightmare for Greece, which had brought Kilic and two other Ocalan associates from Nairobi, Kenya, on Thursday. Greek officials hoped giving the Ocalan allies shelter would end the harsh fallout following the arrest of the Kurdish leader by Turkish commandos on Feb. 15.

But Kilic did not offer other evidence to back up her accusations or show what Greece would stand to gain by helping hand over Ocalan to its arch-rival Turkey.

The government slammed Kilic's charges, arguing that she had "completely adopted the most wretched Turkish propaganda."

"This delirium of false and anti-Greek charges... cannot be tolerated," said government spokesman Dimitris Reppes.

"Many questions remain unanswered and we will look into the role played by Ms. Kilic," Kilic joined Ocalan while he was hiding at the Greek ambassador's residence in Nairobi. The two other women brought from Kenya with Kilic were not present at the news conference.

Ocalan is facing trial — and possible execution — in Turkey.

Also Saturday, three Kurds killed during protests at the Israeli consulate in Berlin 10 days ago were buried in their

native villages, as German police announced that a fourth Kurd had died of his injuries.

Meanwhile, Turkish police said security forces killed 17 Kurdish rebels in fighting in the Kurdish majority region of southeast Anatolia.

The coffins of the three Kurds arrived at Ankara from Berlin Friday and were transported to the villages where the victims, all Turkish citizens, were born.

They were shot dead by Israeli security guards Feb. 17 while protesting against Israel's alleged role — denied by Tel Aviv — in the abduction from Kenya of Abdullah Ocalan by Turkish commandos.

Sema Alp, 18, was buried in her village of Baglica in southeastern Turkey, while Mustafa Kurt, 28, was buried in Gozenek and Ahmet Acar, 24, was interred in Ayran, near the southeastern border with Syria.

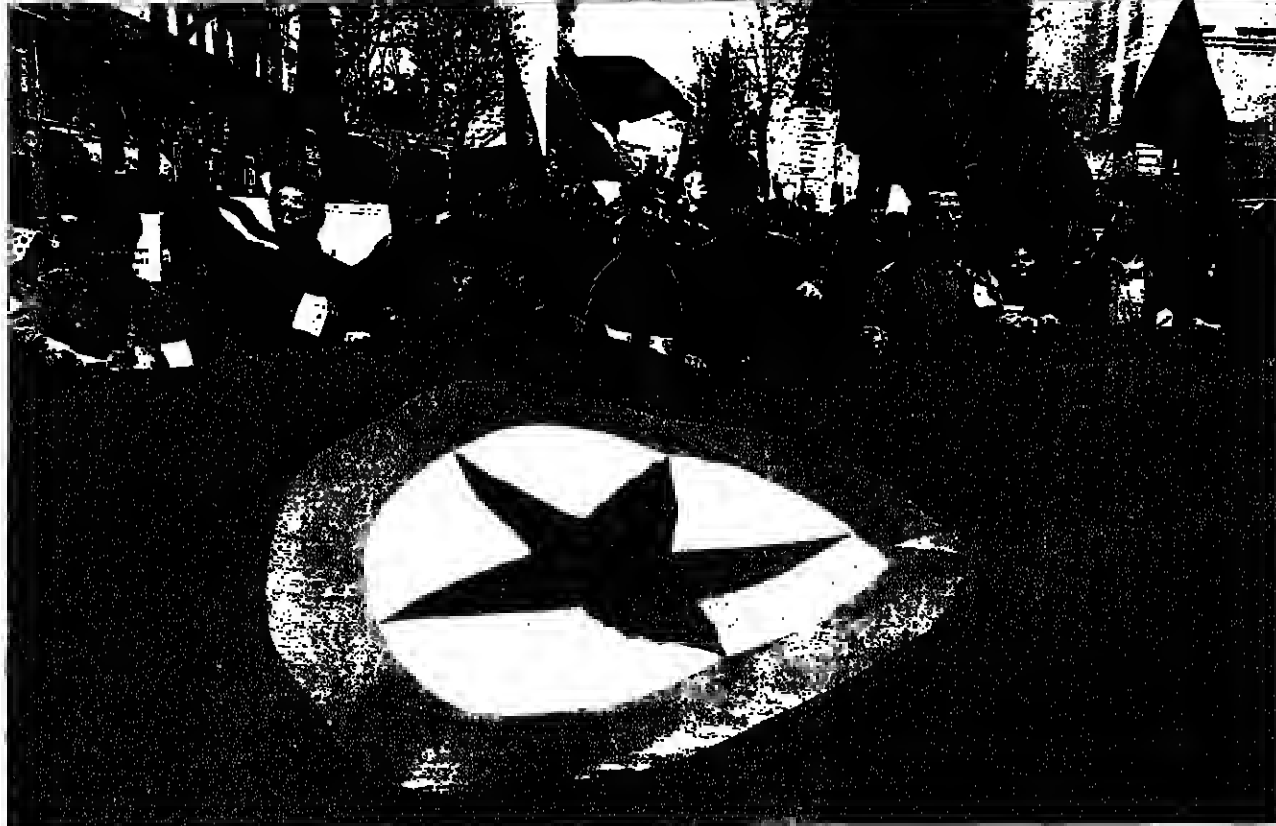
The identity of the fourth victim, who died Saturday of "a gunshot wound," was not disclosed.

In Diyarbakir in southeastern Turkey, police headquarters said 16 rebels with Ocalan's Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) were killed in fighting in the Simak area on the border with Syria and Iraq.

Another rebel was killed in the Mardin province on the Syrian border, the same source said.

Ocalan's arrest caused an uproar in Greece and led to the dismissal of three cabinet ministers as well as Greece's National Intelligence Service Director Haralambos Stavrakakis.

PKK has been waging a 15-year war for Kurdish autonomy against Turkey, costing more than 29,000 lives. Many Greeks sympathise with the PKK's struggle and feel their govern-



Protestors carry a Kurdish flag Saturday in Paris during a march by about 1,000 people demanding the release of Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan. Ocalan, head of the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) was arrested by Turkish authorities in Kenya Feb. 15 and faces the death penalty if found guilty by a Turkish court set to pass judgement after March 24 (AFP photo)

ment let Ocalan down.

Kilic accused top Greek government officials of deliberately misleading Ocalan and precipitating his "delivery into the blood-stained hands of Turkey."

She claimed Stavrakakis had passed details of Ocalan's whereabouts onto the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and that Greece had worked with other countries toward his capture.

"Greece, the United States, Russia, Israel and Turkey took part in this conspiracy," Kilic said. "We would like our friends the Greek people to

know the truth... They were betrayed together with us."

The PKK would continue fighting Turkey, she said, but ruled out any action against Greece or other countries she accused of helping capture Ocalan.

Greek judges have launched an investigation into the circumstances on Ocalan's arrest and were due to interview the Kurdish aides later Saturday.

There was no immediate government reaction from the government to Kilic's allegations.

Across Europe, investigators, activists and the media were

still trying to piece together the events leading up to Ocalan's arrest on Feb. 15 after leaving the Greek ambassador's residence in Nairobi.

The Greek secret service agent Savvas Kaledonidis who had been responsible for Ocalan's security in Kenya testified behind closed doors in Athens overnight. Greek legal sources said Saturday.

A mysterious Greek terrorist group also claimed responsibility in Ocalan's name for two bombings on Friday against the headquarters of Greek Orthodox Church and the

Athens Stock Exchange, denouncing Greece's role in the affair, Greek police said.

Italian Premier Massimo D'Alema told the German weekly Der Spiegel, in an interview to appear Monday, that Rome had tried to find a country outside Europe where Ocalan — who was in Italy between November and January — could seek asylum.

D'Alema said the Kurdish leader had refused, preferring to stay in Europe, while Bonn "did not want" to have him extradited to Germany for PKK crimes committed there.

ANKARA (AFP) — Captured Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan accused his ex-wife of ordering the 1986 assassination of Sweden's late Prime Minister Olof Palme, the Turkish daily Sabah said Saturday, quoting the rebel leader.

"The assassination of Olof Palme was ordered by my ex-wife Kesire according to information I received after the attack," Ocalan told magistrates during questioning at the Istanbul island prison in the Sea of Marmara where he is being held, the paper said.

"I gave no order for the assassination of Olof Palme. After the attack, I found out that he had been killed by men close to my ex-wife," he said.

Palme was gunned down by an unidentified assailant while walking down a busy street in central Stockholm with his wife, after leaving a cinema on Feb. 28, 1986.

Sweden's justice ministry declined to comment, but a ministry spokesman said that Ocalan's allegation was being examined "with interest."

Turkish press reports in 1985 said Kesire had fallen out with Ocalan over the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK), which he headed, and its armed struggle for independence. After their divorce, she left the organisation.

With a small group of Ocalan opponents she founded the PKK-Vejine, but little is known about the group today.

Ocalan was captured by Turkish commandos in Nairobi and taken to Ankara on Feb. 16, where he faces the death penalty for treason and separatism.

Despite hundreds of leads and years of investigations, the Palme murder has never been solved.

A reward of 50 million Swedish krona (\$6.5 million) is still available for anyone providing information that would help solve the crime.

Ocalan has previously said that he had information about the Palme killing and he would be prepared to speak to Swedish police.

In an interview with the Swedish evening paper Aftonbladet in December, Ocalan said the murder was committed "in order to incriminate the PKK."

"It was a way for conservative groups to turn world opinion against the search for a peaceful solution to the Kurdish situation," he said.

"Palme was a true friend of the Kurdish people and never spoke of the Kurdish liberation struggle as being terrorism," Ocalan said.

The Swedish police long investigated the so-called "PKK lead," one of the principal lines of inquiry in the Palme investigation, but without success.

Sweden refused the PKK leader political asylum 10 years ago.

The Kurdish lead was originally based on phone conversations monitored by police keeping PKK activities in Sweden under surveillance before the Palme murder. These indicated that the PKK planned to commit a high-profile murder in Scandinavia.

A year later, in January 1987, Swedish police arrested some 20 Kurds, but had to release them for lack of evidence.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Hostage situation resolved with drink

HELSINKI (AP) — A man who said he was embittered with society took his wife hostage until police arrived and ended the stand-off with a six-pack of beer. The man held his wife hostage and threatened to blow up the apartment building he lived in Friday morning in downtown Helsinki. He said he was armed and that he carried explosives and made several demands to police. Police complied with only one of the demands — for beer and cigarettes — and the man soon surrendered. "We have to consider if we should always carry beer and cigarettes for cases like this," police Inspector Reijo Muutu was quoted as saying in the newspaper Iltasanomat.

Arafat's only presidential rival dies

RAMALLAH (AP) — Samiha Khalil, a pioneering social activist who was the only candidate to stand against Yasser Arafat in the Palestinian National Authority's presidential election three years ago, died Saturday. Khalil, 76, suffered a heart attack three days after being admitted to hospital in Ramallah with heart problems, a Palestinian official said. A member of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), which opposes the peace process with Israel, she was arrested six times by Israeli authorities and put under house arrest for two years. In 1982, she set up a family aid association in the West Bank which she chaired until her death. Khalil, who accused Arafat of making too many concessions to Israel, garnered only 10 per cent of the vote in the January 1996 presidential election, against 85 per cent for the Palestinian leader.

Iran begins war games in Gulf

TEHRAN (R) — Iran's navy began exercises in the Gulf on Saturday, near an island also claimed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Iranian news agency IRNA reported. Navy spokesman Fariborz Fazel told IRNA the air force would also join the nine-day "Fateh-77" (Victory-77) war-games. He said 11 warships, two submarines, eight helicopters, three diving units and 10 special operations units would take part in the nine-day games.

Helicopter crash in Iran kills one

CAIRO (AP) — A helicopter crashed into an airport building in eastern Iran on Friday, killing one person and injuring six others, the official Islamic Republic news agency reported. The crash took place at the airport in Birjand, 480 kilometres southeast of the capital Tehran.

'Russian soldiers sold into captivity'

MOSCOW (AP) — Soldiers deployed in the troubled Caucasus region of Russia sold their colleagues into captivity in neighbouring Chechnya, Russian media reported Saturday. Over the past two years, 46 soldiers and officers from the 136th Motorised Brigade, based in the town of Buynaksk, have disappeared, and the majority of them were being handed over to Chechen kidnappers, Sub. Lieut. Ramazan Salimov, military commandant of the Buynaksk garrison, told the Kommersant daily. Interior Minister Sergei Stepashin, who paid an inspection visit to Dagestan on Friday, said that soldiers of the 136th made up the biggest contingent of the more than 100 Russian soldiers currently being held captive in Chechnya. "The soldiers themselves were engaged in the slave trade," Salimov said, according to the newspaper.

Erbakan's political comeback rejected

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkish electoral authorities on Saturday rejected a comeback bid by former Islamist Premier Necmettin Erbakan. Anatolia news agency reported. Erbakan had filed documents last week stating that he planned to contest a deputy's seat in the central district of Konya as an independent candidate in the April 13 legislative elections. The electoral committee also refused to allow former Justice Minister Sevtik Kizil, a top aide to Erbakan, to stand for election as an independent in Bilecik, northwestern Turkey, Anatolia said.

Iraq says 'enemy' warplanes wound 23

BAGHDAD (AFP) — The latest skirmish in an aerial war of attrition between Baghdad and U.S.-British allies left 23 Iraqis wounded on Saturday when "enemy" jets hit targets in the south, a military spokesman said.

The spokesman told the official INA news agency that 11 "enemy" formations carried out 28 sorties.

"These black crows bombed military and civilian sites in the Missan province, injuring 23 citizens," he said.

"F-14s, F-15s and F-18s, backed by AWACS aircraft penetrated Iraqi airspace at 0515 GMT and left it at 0638 GMT," the spokesman said.

"Our anti-aircraft defences resisted these hostile formations, forcing them to flee with shame and defeat to their harmful bases from where they took off in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia," he said.

The report described the casualties as "citizens," leaving it unclear if they were civilians or soldiers.

The attacks came as Vice President Tahya Yassin Ramadan reiterated Iraq's determination to fight the no-fly zones.

"Iraq rejects the logic of force adopted by the United States to impose their hegemony on the whole world," Ramadan told journalists on the sidelines of a conference in Baghdad.

"The violation of Iraq's airspace is a continuation of the aggression in 1991 [Gulf War] and not that which took place in 1998 [Desert Fox air war]. With this new escalation we expect a new aggression any moment," he said.

These were the latest attacks since Wednesday, when Iraq said U.S. strikes on anti-aircraft defences south of Baghdad had left "several dead and injured."

The ruling Baath Party's Al Thawra newspaper on Friday urged Arab states to pressure Saudi Arabia and Kuwait into halting the U.S.-led overflights from their territory.

"The Kuwaiti and Saudi leaderships play as important a role in this aggression as the United States, by putting their bases at the service of the aggressors," the newspaper said.

It accused Saudi Arabia and Kuwait "of providing financial and logistical help to ensure the continuation and intensification of the aggression."

The United States and Britain have been staging regular raids on Iraqi air defences in the no-fly zones over Iraq since December's Desert Fox air strikes.

The no-fly zones, north of the 36th Parallel and south of the 33rd Parallel, were set up by the allied forces in the aftermath of the 1991 war in support of U.N. resolutions.

They are aimed at protecting the Kurdish population in the north and Shiite Muslims in the south from repression by Iraqi government forces, although they are not covered by any U.N. resolution.

Iraq has repeatedly condemned the zones as illegal.

Hizbollah admits Israeli raid killed three

NABATIYEH (AP) — Israeli warplanes raided suspected guerrilla bases in southern Lebanon on Saturday.

The warplanes swooped over the Jabal Al Rafih mountain, firing two missiles, Lebanese security officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The mountain lies in an area that faces the Israeli-occupied zone of southern Lebanon and is a stronghold of Iranian-backed Hizbollah guerrillas. It is about 10 km northwest of the market town of Nabatiyeh.

There were no immediate reports of casualties.

In Tel Aviv, an Israeli military statement said its planes had

"hit terrorist targets" in south-east Lebanon and returned safely to base.

Earlier Saturday, Hizbollah admitted that three of its fighters have been killed by Israeli forces on Wednesday, overturning its earlier denial of casualties.

The bodies of three guerrillas killed were retrieved by their comrades on Friday from the area of Taybeh and Wadi Solouki in the Israeli-occupied zone. Hizbollah said in a statement.

During the retrieval operation, guerrillas clashed with Israeli troops and their militia allies. Hizbollah identified the three

as Hassan Muhieddin Hamza, 23, Ihab Haider Mideh, 22 and Rabbie Ibrahim Marzouk, 19.

The pro-Israeli militia, the South Lebanon Army, had said four Hizbollah guerrillas were killed in a clash in Markaba — near Taybeh and Wadi Solouki — on Wednesday.

But Hizbollah denied this, saying its guerrillas had returned safely to base, with the exception of one who was missing. Markaba is three kilometres from the Israeli border.

On Friday, the fourth guerrilla turned up in a hospital in Sidon where he told reporters that he was chased by Israeli helicopters and troops.

Eritrea retreats for second straight day

ASMARA (R) — Eritrean troops beat a fresh retreat in parts of the contested Badme border region on Saturday, after Ethiopia broke through part of their defensive line on Friday, a senior Eritrean official said.

"Eritrean forces are withdrawing to positions they are happy with," Eritrean presidential adviser Yemane Gebremeskel told Reuters.

"Those places which are vulnerable, we have to move."

Eritrean troops had already retreated a few kilometres on Friday after the Ethiopian breakthrough, but many decided to pull back again on Saturday to stronger positions, Yemane said.

"It is much more important to have places which are strongly defensible rather than just holding territory," he said.

The Eritrean official added that fighting erupted again on

Saturday along the 60-kilometre Badme front, but on a much smaller scale than on the previous four days.

Meanwhile, Eritrean Foreign Minister Haile Wolde Tensak changed that Israel had supplied advanced MiG warplanes to Ethiopia, and accused the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) of being unable to resolve the Horn of Africa conflict.

"Israel delivered updated versions of the sophisticated MiG aircraft to the Ethiopian air force," he said in remarks published Saturday in Egyptian government newspaper Al Ahram.

Israel "has aligned itself with Ethiopia to encourage it to continue the fighting and ensure its air force's superiority," he said.

He said the development forced Asmara to obtain MiG 29 planes "as a deterrent and to

stop the Ethiopian air strikes on Eritrean positions."

Ethiopian air strikes violate a U.S.- and OAU-sponsored moratorium signed with Eritrea June 14 on the use of aircraft. Addis Ababa's violation of the moratorium "shows that the OAU is unable to ensure a relevant solution to the dispute," the Eritrean minister said.

It also demonstrates that the OAU should not "monopolise" mediation efforts and that the organisation is "weak and in need of support," he said.

He appealed to the EU to continue its mediation and said Eritrea was leaning towards a possible-Egyptian initiative for resolving the conflict.

The current bout of fighting began on Tuesday with an Ethiopian ground offensive aimed at recapturing land occupied by Eritrean forces last May.

Large turnout for Iran's elections hailed as advance for democracy

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran's first local elections were acclaimed Saturday as a major advance for grassroots democracy 20 years after the Islamic revolution but they also highlighted the bitter divide between moderates and the regime's hardline clerics.

Although no official figures have been published for Friday's landmark poll, Iranian newspapers said turnout was strong, particularly among young people who are among the most ardent supporters of reform.

The English-language Iran News described the election, seen as a key test for the reformist agenda of President Mohammad Khatami, as "the biggest experiment of democracy and decentralisation in the Islamic state."

"Feb. 26, 1999, will henceforth be

recalled as one of the important socio-political events in the tumultuous history of this land in which tyrants, traitors, predators and also patriots ruled for more than 25 centuries," trumpeted the Iran Daily, another English-language paper.

Reformers had been hoping for a strong turnout from the nation's 40 million eligible voters, particularly among the women and young people who helped sweep Khatami to his shock election victory in 1997.

"People's rule over their own destiny is a manifestation of one of the revolution's biggest ideals," said Khatami, who is battling to get his reforms past the hardline clerics who dominate most of the country's religious and political institutions.

Interior Minister Abdolvahed Musavi-Lari said Friday that voter participation in what newspapers said was the country's 20th election since the 1979 revolution had been "heavy" although he gave no figures.

He said it would take at least a week to complete the counting of the ballots and publish the final results in all parts of the country.

Tehran, with almost 10 million residents, is the biggest prize in the election, followed by the four other big cities of Isfahan, Shiraz, Mashhad and Tabriz — all with about 1,000 candidates. A total of around 200,000 seats on 33,000 municipal councils were at stake.

"The people's massive turnout at the polling booths yesterday reflected their

enormous confidence and trust in the system," said the conservative Tehran Times.

But the campaign was marred by violence and intense political wrangling with hardliners and reformers seeking to consolidate local power bases for next year's parliamentary elections.

The Iran Daily said the elections took place "despite deep and dangerous differences between the two top factions, each with an entirely different approach to political participation and rule-based governance."

"The so-called rightist camp made little effort to camouflage its opposition and sheer lack of optimism towards this new and necessary exercise," it added.

The Tehran Times, expressing its concern over the political violence, spoke out against "rogue elements" seeking to damage the democratic process.

"Such a political phenomenon is detrimental to the political health and stability of our system," it said in an editorial.

Some newspapers also pointed to imperfections in the election process itself.

Kayhan International said that while there was a large variety of candidates, "the downside was that there were too many candidates, which made quite a number of lay people confused, and unable to vote."

In Tehran some 4,000 people were standing for office, most of them unknown to the general public.